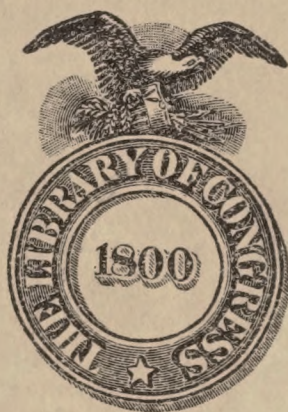




THE RED-HOUSE CHILDREN'S VACATION

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS



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“OH, HERE ARE THE MONKEYS!” SANG OUT PRIM.—Page 214.

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RED HOUSE CHILDREN'S
VACATION**

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUISE WYMAN



BOSTON

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ANTICIPATING PLEASURE	I
II. VISITORS	20
III. GOING TO A PARTY	39
IV. LIKE A FAIRY STORY	57
V. A SUMMER IDYL	75
VI. POOR MRS. PEACOCK	97
VII. A DELIGHTFUL HAPPENING	115
VIII. AS GOOD AS CAMPING OUT	128
IX. HOW RHODA BEARDED THE LION	146
X. A BOY'S GOOD TIME	165
XI. A DAY OF DAYS	187
XII. PLAYING AT QUALITY	208
XIII. A ROYAL FEAST	222
XIV. A CHARITY WORK	242
XV. NOT ALL FOR PLEASURE	266
XVI. A HOME PICNIC	277
XVII. FARMER DENT	296
XVIII. FARMER DENT'S WIFE	318
XIX. THE LAST OF VACATION	335

ILLUSTRATIONS

" OH, HERE ARE THE MONKEYS !" SANG OUT PRIM (Page 214)	<i>Frontispiece</i> ✓
	FACING PAGE
LAUREL WAS SETTING OUT HER STORE OF TOYS	26 ✓
THERE ON A BOARD LAY POOR LITTLE MRS. PEACOCK	98 ✓
" TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FOLKS. ARE YOU VERY RICH ? "	144 ✓
DOWN THE LEVEL MEADOW THEY WENT	290 ✓
NEVER HAD THE BIG LIVING-ROOM SEEN SUCH MERRIMENT	334 ✓

THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN'S VACATION

CHAPTER I

ANTICIPATING PLEASURE

"TEN lovely weeks to do nothing but have fun!" exclaimed Primrose Firth. "It's just elegant!"

"Is that the strongest adjective you can find?" inquired Linn. "Then the mighty are indeed fallen."

"Oh, no. You'll hear from me before the day is over. There may be a judicious economy in words."

"I hope you do not mean to idle it all away," said her mother.

" 'Bee and butterfly
Dance in the sunshine, so do I;'

that is, I mean to," answered Prim.

"You had better go out and weed your garden," suggested Amaryllis. "It looks shameful."

"Big weeds pull up easier. You can take hold of them and wring them round——"

"And break them off and let them sprout again."

They were getting up from the breakfast table.

"Well, I'll go and look at it," and Prim nodded. "Oh, think of the things that are to happen!" and she began to dance around. "Do you suppose Mrs. Brenner really means to give us a party? And she's one of the aristocrockery. The house and grounds are magnif'."

"Oh, Prim, don't be so slangy!"

"Shakespeare, then." She curled up her two little fingers. "You find lots of slang in the plays. Now, don't interrupt while I go on with the blessings that I hope won't take their flight. There's Mr. Collamore's day. Where do you suppose he will take us? And Denby is coming over to visit us to see if things are really so. And Chan's friend. Maybe some more things will happen. Youth is the golden time to enjoy life before the days come when you don't have any pleasure in them, according to Solomon the Wise."

Mr. Mann laughed heartily.

"I don't see why we have to go to school when you don't," began Tip complainingly.

"But I want to go," interposed Rhoda.

"Because Miss Raynor gives good measure pressed down and running over, twelve full weeks to the quart—*er*."

Tip looked serious. He often made objections, but he always enjoyed school when he was once there. His mother took the two small ones to see that they were in proper trim, and start them off.

The others went out to the garden. Rilla's bed of China pinks was a delight. There were so many varieties and colors. Some had fringy edges and were very large. Marigold's bed was really a show in almost every shade of yellow, some blooms large enough for dahlias, down to the little velvety ones in brown and yellow. There had been many discussions with Tip, who, after he had given up the potatoes, insisted on corn and sunflowers. The chickens and the birds liked the seeds. And he would sell the corn to Cap.

Dan gave a sly wink to the others. "Tell you what you had better do, Tip," he began. "Come farther down and have a big plot. Corn wants a good deal of room and you have to hill it up. Then sunflowers make a shade all round. You couldn't have more than two."

"And I'll take yours and give you some of the flowers," said Chan.

It was settled that way and they were all glad to get rid of Tip. Chan set the bed out all in heliotrope, and it gave promise of being beautiful. They were all in very fair order except Prim's.

"I'll never choose pansies again. See how scraggly they grow after a while."

"Because you haven't taken good care of them. Look how many seed pods there are! And if you had pinched off some of the ends! Eternal vigilance is the price of a good many things beside liberty."

"Why do weeds grow everywhere? Think of the work it makes when you might be out having fun. And they're not a mite of good!"

Primrose went to work vigorously.

"Oh, Prim, why don't you put on some gloves? You spoil your finger-nails."

"Cats in gloves—Miss Primmy. I think you'll sure be an old maid, or else you'll die young of cleanliness. I can scrub my hands."

"And you don't keep your nails half clean," said Rilla.

"I have heard that dirt is healthy. I want to be healthy, wealthy, and wise," with an impressive nod.

"Children, I must go," said their father.

They clung around him even outside of the garden. It might not be the height of propriety, but neither party cared if the neighbors did see them. And they all cried, "Come back early!"

Prim returned to her pansies. When the weeds were out, they did look scraggly. Chan snipped off the ends of some, and they both picked off the seed vessels.

"Why, if they fall on the ground won't they come up next year?" she asked.

"I suppose some of them would. Now we might plant these ripe ones in a cold frame. If they come up—why, they will blossom in six or seven weeks."

"Good. We will try it. There is nothing like learning by experience, though the copy says it is a dear teacher."

"And see here, Prim, why not take up two or three of these bunchy ones to fill up the waste spots? They are just beginning to bloom."

"Oh, that's splendid! You do know so much about—well, 'most everything, Chan."

He lifted them carefully with the trowel and set them in their new home, covering them with a flower pot. Cap was beginning to hang out clothes already.

There were two beautiful oval rose beds that

had bloomed abundantly, and the fence between them and the Greers was just a hedge of running roses. There were other flowers also; their peony beds had been a sight of beauty. Mr. Gedney had undertaken to show his neighbors what a city man could do, and had spared no money. But Dan had a great love for flowers, for gardening of all kinds, and he was in his element now, with the new employer and the children.

"For it's something," he said to his mother, "to be treated as if you were a human being and had feelin's as well as others."

Rilla and Marigold made beds and dusted. Laurel took her best doll and went down to see Amy. Linn went over to the Bradleys'; their attempt at a gymnasium interested him very much.

"I wish there were enough boys to form a ball club," Stuart said to him. "We might have a little practice at football, not going through the whole rigmarole. There is going to be a game next fall between our High School and Claremont. Wouldn't you like to go?"

"Well, I just would, though I don't know a thing about it but what I've read in books. And there are some first-class boys' books. Father gave me two. Chan's taste doesn't run that way."

"We have a lot I'll be glad to lend you. Everything seems so nice and clean over at your house. I can't bear to have my books roughly used. And the schoolboys are allowed to take books out of the Ridgewood library."

"That's a good thing to know, and I'll see if Father or Dan can't rig us up something in the carriage-house for stunts. Then Prim would spend half her time there. She's the greatest hand to climb trees and scramble over rocks."

"I like Prim," Stuart said.

When Rilla and Marigold were through beds and dusting, they went to the sewing-room. Marigold was quite anxious to learn to sew on the machine. Mrs. Mann had a pile of new summer frocks on hand, white ones and some very pretty ones of a stuff called silk gingham that really looked like fine, lovely silk.

Prim and Mrs. Alden were looking after the luncheon.

At table Prim asked suddenly, "Mother, can't Dan take us over to Denby this afternoon? I'd like so to see the girls and talk about school matters. And couldn't we ask some of them to come over and visit us? Some of their fathers have a horse and wagon."

"Well—if Dan is at liberty."

"And we will stop at the Bachmans'. Why, we'll have quite a picnic."

"And I wish you would call at Mrs. Burnham's and see how they all are."

"We'll do quite a stroke of business," laughed Goldie.

"Father said we must take turns in learning to drive," remarked Rilla. "I'm not afraid of Bonnie, she's so gentle."

Dan said his work wouldn't suffer. Amy Boyce came to spend the afternoon with Laurel. Cap was going to iron the common articles and get them out of the way. Mrs. Alden came upstairs and asked if there wasn't some sewing she could help along with.

So the girls started in a gay mood. They went down the lane first. Ah, how pretty and tidy the old house looked in its new paint and the cleared-up appearance.

Mrs. Bachman greeted them. "Oh, you *must* come in. Think, we have thirty-two young chickens, and a nice pig that husband took in part payment for some clothes he made. They were rushed from the factory and prices were very good. And everything has been so delightful. Fritz and his father made garden by odd spells, and so much fruit as we are going to have! Why,

it seems like a little bit of heaven." Poor Grandmother Grau had been quite ill, but was getting better, only so homesick. She missed her old friends so much. "I run down when I can. Well, we were homesick at first. But we were young and there was so much to do, and now we're so happy."

Greta was crocheting lace for a lady, who was going to pay her.

"We're crocheting, too," exclaimed Goldie. "Isn't it exciting work! You are all the time wanting to get just one point farther. Oh, and you've made some new carpet—how pretty it is!"

"Yes, there were so many bits upstairs. We were so glad to have them. And some of Father's trimmings. We use up everything," smiling all over her rosy face.

"I wonder if old Aunt Hitty's things did so much good anywhere else," said Goldie when they were back in the surrey. "Think how glad Linn was for his coat, and it was a nice-looking one, too, not as handsome as his Christmas coat, but if that hadn't come he would have worn it all winter. O dear, what splendid things have happened to us, and then to the Bachmans! Why, it makes you feel good all over, as if Christmas had come a dozen times through the year!"

Then they went on to the Lewis's. Kitty and Marty were schoolmates of the girls. There were two older daughters and a son, and a younger boy.

"Oh!" Marty almost shrieked, "it's the Firth girls with their driver and all dressed up, while we look like Time in the primer! Oh, girls, we're glad to see you, but it's been wash-day, and Mother would have the bedding out. That made us late. Oh, can't you get out a little while? We're so glad to see you, leastways *I* am."

Mrs. Lewis came out and renewed the invitation. The girls hurried off to "slick up" a bit.

"We've been doing a stroke of work to-day. Susy's home from the mill, laid off for a week, an' I said she must put in an' work or she'd forget how. Oh, come in," and she pushed open the parlor shutters. "Marty, you run and get a pitcher of spruce beer. It's pretty hot, leastways when you're working. We ain't lucky enough to be drivin' round with our hands in our laps an' our best clothes on."

She laughed good-naturedly.

"An' now tell us about your mother. I s'pose she's as happy as a bee in a red clover field, havin' all she wants. What can she do with all her time keepin' two helps? Great change for her. An', I s'pose you all get along——"

"Oh, just splendidly. Our new father's the best and loveliest man, and we're all well and happy."

"Well, it does just beat all! Sounds like some of the things you read in books. He must be an uncommon kind of man. Mr. Beers was awful disappointed about not keeping Linn. What's he doing?"

"Oh, we are all going to school at Ridgewood. I believe we are part of the town, but we haven't any school near by."

Then Marty and Kitty took possession of the girls and talked over school matters. They had a new teacher, Miss Bond, who was very nice and sweet. Miss Case had something queer the matter with her and went to one of them sanitation places. "Did you get promoted, Rilla?"

"Oh, no, we only went one term. It's so different there, and you have to learn more things."

"Do you know many girls, or are they stuck up? Grafton is such a high and mighty place, full of rich people. And oh, Chan sang in church on Easter. Is he real well again?"

"Yes, and he has grown taller."

"And the twins! Marty thinks she won't go to school no more. She can get a place in the box factory. And there are four girls of us to dress.

Cap Terry's at your house, isn't she? Oh, she does go on, an' she thinks your mother the wonderfulest woman, and your father a saint right out of heaven."

"Oh, I wish you came over to Sunday School so we could see you oftener," exclaimed Marty.

"We go to the pretty little chapel. I like it very much," said Rilla.

Then they discussed some other girls and the fun and the pranks and how they missed Linn from school and Goldie and Prim, and they could have talked all the afternoon, but Rilla said they must go, and rose.

"Can't you girls come over to tea?" Mrs. Lewis asked cordially. "We'd be proper glad to have you. Why, I declare, it's quite a treat. And you must give my best respects to your mother. I'd be pleased enough to see her, and I'm glad she's done so well. I don't know any one more deservin'. I'd come over if I had a horse and buggy. And you children ought to be thankful for all your good fortune."

"Indeed we are," returned Amaryllis fervently.

"Maybe we'll find a chance to come over some day," said Marty.

"Do try," returned Prim. "And Dan shall bring you home."

"That's awful good of you. You girls aren't a bit stuck up with all that good fortune."

So they made their adieus, leaving happy hearts behind them.

"And it was so good not to have a lot of advice and fears thrown at you. But some day we ought to take something nice to Granny Keen. My! how delighted she'd be to have carriage company," declared Goldie. "Now, Dan, to the Williams's."

There was only Eunice Williams, whom they had been very fond of at school. She was a rather delicate girl with a tendency to a cough, and now she had grown much thinner. She was delighted to see them.

"I don't know what is the matter," she began wearily. "You see I was studying real hard to get a diploma. I wanted to teach, and Father thought he might send me to the Ridgewood High School to stay through the week with a cousin. Well, we went over, and I had the list of things you had to answer to get in. My! I couldn't begin to answer them. Why, we don't learn half of them. And the man said I'd have to enter the grammar school and graduate. I felt so disappointed," and the tears filled her eyes. "I should so love to teach. But Denby is far behind the

other towns. Miss Ford said to come back next year and she'll give me some private lessons."

"Oh, that was nice of her."

"But I'm so tired all the time. Mother thinks I give way to it. Oh, you all look so well and rosy, and how splendid you were that Sunday you came over. How the girls did envy you! And your father's very rich, isn't he?"

"Well, not exactly," said Rilla with some hesitation. "He is in a very good business. And he wants us to be happy and do the best we can."

"Oh, tell me about your school. Do you have to study all those dreadful things?"

"Well, Rilla's in some of them and Linn wants to enter the graduating class, but it has two divisions. Father wants him to go to the High School. And we know ever so many nice girls. And, oh, the clergyman is young and ever so pleasant."

Eunice sighed.

"I wish you would come over and spend a day with us. We have a beautiful garden, and a piano. Some of us are learning to play."

"Oh, that would be lovely. Father might bring me over," and the girl's face beamed with joy.

"And Dan will fetch you back. We'll have such a nice time."

"Why, I feel better already. And we'll talk about school. Yes, I'll be just delighted."

They bade her a really affectionate adieu, but they were quite sober on the way to Mrs. Briggs', where they had a fine time. Then they went to Mrs. Burnham's.

The minister's wife was full of perplexity. They were going to a clerical gathering the next day and expected to take Katy. But she had dropped down, had a headache, and looked feverish.

"And I had counted on it so. It's a year since I have been away anywhere. You meet so many nice bright people it cheers you up. But I'd be afraid to take Katy lest she might be real ill, and I hate to leave her at home with the girl, who wants to go away herself on a little visit. It does seem as if I had the luck of being disappointed," said the anxious mother.

"Oh, Mrs. Burnham, couldn't you let her come over to our house and stay a week?" asked Rilla eagerly. "You know you half promised the twins that she might come. And if she was sick, Mother could take care of her. And there's Mrs. Alden. We're home for vacation, and I know Mother'd be real glad to do it. We all would be."

"How good you are! You are so much like

your mother, Rilla. Oh, I don't know—husband had counted so on my going."

"Yes, do," said the three girls in a breath.

"But it will make you so much trouble."

"Oh, no. And you were always so good to Mother. When do you want to start?"

"About noon."

"Well, then, Mother will come over in the morning and you can settle it——"

"If Katy isn't worse."

"We shall like to have her so much. Oh, I don't believe she will be real ill. Anyway—when you've seen Mother——"

"My dear Rilla, thank you," Mrs. Burnham stooped and kissed her. "I'm glad you are all so well and happy. There's to be a missionary meeting Tuesday evening and husband wants to attend that. We are to stay with an old friend. Well, we'll see."

It was getting quite late, although the days were long.

"I suppose Mother *will* go," said Marigold hesitatingly. "It was lovely of you to think of it, Rilla."

"Mother has always said she would like to do something for Mrs. Burnham," was the confident reply.

They were home just in time to make themselves ready for dinner. There was so much to tell. The enjoyable calls everywhere, and on Wednesday Grandma Briggs and Lidie were coming over for the day. Then they told of Eunice Williams's disappointment about not being able to enter the High School.

"And she looks so poorly, Mother," said Amaryllis. "She was always so nice to us, I felt so sorry for her."

"I don't believe any scholar from Denby could enter our graduating class," declared Linn with a boy's pride. "They thought me smart over there," nodding his head, "and Mr. Beers thought I didn't need any more schooling, but could keep right on in business. The way I've studied for the last six months is enough to make your head spin. Denby School indeed!" and Linn's contempt was amusing.

After they had gone to the library, Amaryllis put her arm about her mother and drew her into the parlor.

"Mother, dear," she began rather deprecatingly, "I promised Mrs. Burnham something, when she seemed so troubled about Katy and wanted so to go to the meetings. She is to stay with a friend she has not seen for several years. So I proposed

that Katy should come and make her visit, for somehow I didn't really believe she was going to be ill. And at first Mrs. Burnham seemed so glad. Then she was afraid it would be a great trouble to us. So I said you would come over to-morrow morning and settle the plan. You see, even if you wanted to go to the city with Father, we could get along, for Mrs. Alden is so good."

Rilla's eyes were tenderly wistful and her face in a rosy glow. Why, she was really pretty, the mother thought.

"My dear, I am glad it entered your mind. I can just understand how she would worry about Katy if she took her. It would really spoil her excursion, though Katy is such a nice, obedient little thing. Yes, I will go over in the morning and I am pretty sure I shall bring her back with me. We have had so many nice things that we ought to be ready to pass them along." Then the mother and daughter kissed each other with fervent affection.

Linn was hovering about his father, who held out his hand.

"Father, can't I go down to the city with you to-morrow? And in the afternoon Mr. Bradley is going to take the boys to Central Park and they want me to go with them. Can I?"

"Did Mr. Bradley ask it?"

"No, he wasn't home. But Mrs. Bradley did. She said I would be brought back safe and sound," smiling.

Was there a little twinge of jealousy in the new father's heart that some one else should give the boy the first look at pleasures?

"It was very nice of her to ask you. Some Saturday I will take Mother and all you older children down. You'll like the band. Yes, you may go with them. I know you will have a good time."

CHAPTER II

VISITORS

"I OUGHT not to bother you, Dan. I really think I could drive myself, but I suppose Mrs. Burnham would feel safer about Katy if you went," and Mrs. Mann gave a pleasant laugh.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm teaching Linn to drive, and it would be nice for Miss Rilla to learn. Primrose can get along with the double team, though I don't trust her only for a spurt."

Katy was better this morning, though she was pale and heavy-eyed. Mrs. Burnham admitted the care of her would be quite a drawback to her going about. But Katy was very eager to see Laurel and the playroom and the doll who could talk; and the ride in the carriage.

"And you must not be troublesome, Katy. Dear Bessy, you'll be careful of her diet, won't you? She has such a delicate stomach. Don't give her any candy, and don't let her stay out in the sun or the night air. Oh, I am not sure that I ought to go——"

THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN 21

But just then Mr. Burnham came in, and he took a man's view of the case.

"I want my wife to go with me and have a nice time, Mrs. Mann. And I'm sure the mother of eight hearty, healthy children will know how to take care of our little one. She's a nice little girl, aren't you, Katy? And you mustn't cry for Mother when night comes, but be just as happy and well as the others. And we're coming back to you after a few days. We're going to have a nice time as well."

He caught Katy up in his arms and kissed her. Mrs. Burnham packed some things in a box.

"Never mind the shawls or sacques, we have so many at our house," said Mrs. Mann.

So her mother kissed her good-by, and her father took her out to the surrey, giving her a fond farewell squeeze.

"Let her do just as your children do," he said to Mrs. Mann. "And give her some rosy cheeks."

Katy snuggled up to Mrs. Mann. "I want to see Laurel," she said.

"Oh, Dan, run back and get Katie's doll and the carriage. We must have them."

"But I want to see the doll that talks."

"Yes, you may have that, too. Laurel will let you," was the assuring reply.

"I'll be very good and careful, and can we have tea as we did that other day?"

"Yes, and you shall see another little girl quite as nice as Laurel,—Amy, who comes to play with her. Oh, you will have the nicest time!"

"I'm so glad Mamma let me come." Katy gave a pretty, satisfied laugh. "And they are going away ever so far. Will I have to go back to-morrow?"

"Oh, no," with a sweet smile.

"I want to stay a good long time and see ever so many little girls. I like little girls. I get lonesome with no one to help me play," and she sighed.

There was no doubt of that. Mrs. Mann kept her chattering until they drove round the lawn. Prim and Goldie rushed out with the cry—

"Oh, you've brought her!"

"Yes. I've come to stay a good long while, and I've brought some things and my doll," Katy announced in her old-fashioned way.

"Prim, you run down and get Laurel. And bring up Amy if her mother is willing to have her stay the rest of the day."

Marigold was taking off wraps enough for an autumn day. Then Mrs. Brenner's phaeton drove up, and she alighted with a smiling face.

"You know I said I must have the children over to a party. A cousin has come for a little visit and she has two charming girls. And now I'm on a child hunt. I have secured ten, and let me see—there'll be five of yours, so I will only have to get five more. I want it to be just a plain, funny children's party with no style and no fine dressing, on Thursday afternoon. Friday we go to New York and on Saturday we sail. Miss Amaryllis, and you, Goldenhair, and that lovely Chan——"

"Oh, I'm obliged to you," said Goldie, "for not calling it bright red," and she laughed.

Mrs. Brenner laughed as well.

"There are two more, the big boy and another girl. You must come at four, and have a good time and some refreshments and a little dance and I'll let you go home at nine. Now please, Mrs. Mann, don't think up a single objection. Why, what's the matter with this poor pale little thing?"

"She is a little friend come to stay a few days and get rosy," explained Mrs. Mann.

Primrose appeared with Laurel and Amy.

"Well, *do* you have to borrow children, too?" laughing. "Where is my favorite, Chandler?"

Chan was called downstairs from his book, and the party duly explained. No excuses would be

accepted. She was so cordial and friendly that they were really charmed with her, and all agreed to be present.

"Now I must go and hunt up five more. Oh, no, Mrs. Mann, it won't be a trouble, but a regular picnic! Why, Mr. Brenner is really at the bottom of it. And sometime when we go over, we must take our singing bird, and show him London."

Chan flushed and smiled, and went out to the phaeton with her.

Mrs. Chedister really felt envious.

"It's funny," said Prim. "And everybody thinks she's so sort of great—high and mighty and all that."

"It's very nice for her to make a children's party that way," said Rilla.

"And the house is just splendid," announced Chan. "There's a cabinet that will set Linn wild, and some beautiful marble statues and the softest carpet and a grand piano! I like Mr. Brenner too. He was so nice to me that Sunday."

"O dear! We've never been to a grand party and we've no party frocks," sighed Prim.

"Mrs. Brenner did not say it would be grand. I think she has too good sense to ask children informally and expect them to be in the highest

style. Why, *we* might ask twenty if you knew so many," said the mother, smiling over her little flock.

"I know most of the girls in my class, but I haven't been to their houses, except to the Reads' and to the Rays', and I did go home with Grace Conover. Their house isn't as fine as this. But somehow I don't care for the houses nor the fine clothes, but the real girls you can have fun with," and Prim gave her shoulders a funny shrug. "I believe I like boys the best."

She didn't mind the laugh that naïve confession raised.

Then she took the little ones out to the play-room, and soon had them acquainted with Katy.

"May I make your doll walk and talk for her?" asked Prim of Laurel.

Mrs. Mann was trying to make the children respect each other's belongings.

"Oh, yes," answered Laurel eagerly.

"What's her name?" asked Katy.

"Name Beauty 'tause she has such buful red cheeks."

Beauty was wound up, and walked, to Katy's great delight. She clapped her slim little hands.

"Couldn't I have a walker put in my doll?" she asked of Primrose.

"I think it has to be done when the dolls are made."

"But little bits of real babies don't walk at first," said Amy. "And they tumble down easily and they creep."

"But dolls are not real people," Katy commented. "They don't keep on growing and learning things."

The children looked at each other as if the mystery was too much for them.

Then the doll said "Mamma, Mamma," and Katy was delighted.

"And this is my play-house where I keep all my things. That shelf is Rhoda's. We gave the old Noah's Ark to Cap for her sister's little boy. Tip's got a splendid new one. He lets me have it sometimes. And we play it's goin' to rain and the things run away and don't want to go in. It rained more'n a hundred years."

"Oh, no, only forty days," corrected Katy.

"Well, that's *'most* it."

Laurel was setting out her store of toys and then her dishes. "Now we can play 'come to see.' You can bring Beauty," to Katy, who was studying her pretty white kid hands. "An' I'll put Dolly in bed. She's drefful sick with brown screechers an' earache. An' you must ast me 'bout



LAUREL WAS SETTING OUT HER STORE OF TOYS.—Page 26.

the doctor. Amy'll be the doctor. You must say 'Mrs. Mann,' an' you'll be Mrs. Alden, our house-keeper."

Katy didn't get along very well, but Amy was fine in her part. Prim returned and lent herself gravely to the make-believe.

"What makes you keep the old doll when you have such a nice new one?" asked Katy.

"Oh, she's—she's—well, I love her. She been mine ever since I can 'member. An' Beauty's been here only since Christmas. I couldn't love her so much in that little while."

"But she's so much prettier."

"My dear Dolly, don't mind what they're sayin'. I love you just 'cause I love you. An' Marigold's making you a new frock. But you're drefful sick, but you ain't goin' to die, 'cause I can't spare you."

Mrs. Mann looked in.

"Won't you come and have some lunch?" she asked, and held out her hand to Katy.

They chatted away at the table, but the little visitor did not seem to have much appetite. And when they left the room Katy said, "Mamma told me I must go to bed, but I don't want to, only I must. I'm having such a good time. Is Amy going to stay?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Mann. "It is right to do just what Mamma said."

"I'll put you in my nice bed," began Amaryllis.

The child went reluctantly, but without any objection.

"We don't have to go to bed," interposed Amy. "Let's go out doors an' see who can run fastest."

Katy shut her eyes resolutely, but sleep wouldn't come. It was all so new and strange, and she wondered what the others were doing. Goldie crept in softly and the child smiled.

"Don't you think I might get up? I'm rested, but my eyes haven't any sleepiness in them."

"Oh, yes," said Goldie, helping her down.

"What makes you go to sleep sometimes and not others?"

"Well, that's funny, and I don't believe I can explain it. I don't think the sand man comes so much in the daytime."

"There really isn't any sand man," laughed Katy. "And wouldn't sand hurt your eyes if he sprinkled it in them?"

"Oh, that's what they say. And they don't mean that the sand goes *in* the eyes, but just on the eyelids to make them heavy. They do feel that way sometimes. It's a kind of fine sleepiness.

And then suddenly you go off to the land of Nod. That's a real land, because it's mentioned in the Bible."

"It is?" Katy's eyes opened wide. "I'll ask Father about it." Then she ran to the window, exclaiming, "Oh, I feel all rested! But I couldn't really go to sleep, you know, so I didn't disobey, did I?"

"No, I think your mother only meant a time to rest. And now we'll go down with the children." Laurel and Amy had been playing cat's cradle, having run until they were hot and tired, and sat down on the grass under a tree.

"Let us go and see the peacock. I don't believe you've ever seen one, Katy."

He was kept in quite a large pen and let out occasionally. Now he uttered a horrid shriek and Katy buried her face in Goldie's skirt, crying, "Oh, will he bite you? He's bigger than a turkey!"

"Dan won't let him bite. 'Sides he can't get out," comforted Laurel.

Then as if he found he had frightened the crowd very much, he took a strut up and down, and studied them out of his small beady eyes. And suddenly as if he said, "You just see what I can do," he spread his tail in a magnificent

fashion, and the children were wild with delight.

"He does that sometimes when he's coaxing to get out," said Goldie. "Oh, where's Dan?"

She found him in the barn. Yes, he would come and see.

"If you'll be very good," exclaimed Dan, shaking his finger at the bird, who nodded his head and stepped around as if he was dancing a minuet.

"Oh, isn't that funny!" exclaimed Katy, laughing.

"Now you *must* be very good," said Dan, "and not try to run away"; so he opened the door of the pen.

The children stood aside and the peacock marched out solemnly, and strutted down the path. Then poor little Mrs. Peahen glanced timidly about and followed. Down the path, out to the lawn he went, where he spread himself gorgeously and then began to strut, now and then uttering a discordant cry at which three little girls glanced at each other in affright. They walked behind with numerous oh's and ah's. He was very handsome with his brilliant markings.

The peacock thought he had been on his good behavior long enough. He gave a wild, discordant sort of shriek, and dashed out in the street,

but he was not a very good sprinter, and he cut a funny figure as he seemed to roll from side to side. Dan picked up a little stick, and finding he really could not run away he wheeled around and started back.

"Head him off, Goldie," sang out Dan, and she drove him up the lawn path uttering some fearful shrieks. Then he made a dive at Amy's frock and she screamed, trying to pull it away. Dan came to the rescue. Chan ran out from the barn, and between them both they managed to get the peacock back to his pen.

"He's getting to be an ugly fellow," said Dan. "And the way he treats that poor little hen! I gave him a switching a few days ago. Now, old fellow, your holiday is over."

"An' he teared Amy's frock," began Laurel. "Wasn't he drefful! An' if he'd bit her——"

"He spoiled his own nice time, the mean old fellow! Children, don't you want to go down and swing?"

Prim came out just then. Dan had put up a rather small swing for Laurel and Amy. There was a piece of carpet at the back so they couldn't tip over that way, and a piece of rope they could pull so they could swing themselves.

"I'll sit in with you, Katy. You know, Lal,

that it is good manners to offer the first of everything to the company."

Laurel looked a little wistful, but made no demur.

"Oh, it is almost like flying," said Katy. "When the Sunday School went on the picnic, Mamma was afraid it would make me sick. But it doesn't," and she laughed gleefully.

She wasn't dizzy when she jumped down, and the other two tried it. The older girls walked back to the house and told Cap how mean and contrary the peacock had been. Then they went upstairs to try on their new frocks.

"Katy's getting along first-rate," began Prim. "Oh, Mother, I'm so glad I wasn't a little girl all alone. They don't have half good times."

Mrs. Mann smiled.

Then Tip and Rhoda came home and wanted to try the swing. The three little girls went in and played tea, then took their dolls out in the carriages. Laurel was very good, and let Katy have Beauty. She wrapped Dolly up in a shawl head and ears, "'cause she was awful sick with ligeration, and had to be out in the air so's it wouldn't strike in."

"What is liger—what did you call it?" asked Katy.

"Well, the doctors don't know, but I guess it's like mumps. That swells your head all up and you can't hear."

Rhoda didn't like to be left in the lurch, and came out to them complaining that it wasn't good manners not to invite her to go with them.

"But you wanted to swing," returned Amy. "And we'd swung and swung."

"Well, you might have waited."

Katy was getting tired. They had all been so eager for pleasure she had forgotten her nap, so she went in, and this time she really did sleep, and was bright enough an hour later.

They all had to run to meet Father and tell him how cross the peacock had been. The bird did not like being shut up, and made some dismal noises.

Mr. Mann surveyed the swing, and a thought entered his mind, and he went over to talk to Dan. Then they made some ground measurements and surveyed several trees.

"I'm always afraid of children falling out," Mr. Mann said. "The others are safer. You don't have to hold on, and you can't slip. You are sure you can put it up?"

"Well, I'll get the Brenners' man to come over. Next week?"

"Yes," and Mr. Mann came in with a throng

of children. But Amy had to go home, and Laurel walked clear to the gate with her. The next morning Grandmother Briggs and Lidie came over. Lidie was quite well and could straighten up, and was wild over everything. Such beautiful flowers and such a fine lawn! And the great wide porch was shaded by purple clematis bloom. The children fairly dragged her around the garden, and she must see the cunning flocks of chickens. The little Houdans were very funny. The old peacock was undeniably sulky.

“Well, I declare, it’s most like the garden of Eden,” said Lidie,—“not that I’ve ever seen that, but it just does seem as if there was everything here, and such lots of flowers!”

“Oh, you should have seen the roses,” exclaimed Amaryllis. “Of course most of them were here, but at Easter we had some choice ones sent us, and this pink one blooms all the time. Some of the others do.”

“Well, you’re a lucky lot! And now I guess I’ll go and sit down a bit. I’m not as supple as you children.”

They found Grandmother and Mrs. Mann sitting on the porch, the latter finishing a frock and the old lady busy with her knitting. She too had been expatiating on everything. The border of

scarlet sage just coming into bloom, the great circle of variegated petunias, some with curly edges and in all beautiful colors. The Chedisters' lawn was in fine array as well, and all up and down the street was a perfect garden.

"Well, 'pears as if we'd gone into a new country," said Grandmother. "Bessy, you never could be content in Denby again. Seems to me it grows worse and worse. So many of the houses need painting. I declare, ours and your little old house make the lane quite a beauty spot. And them Bachmans are tenants worth having. They keep everything so tidy. When Germans are nice, they're fine an' no mistake! But, seems to me, shop work is the ruination of the women. They don't care how things go if they earn a little money. They have no time for flowers, only to get some fine clothes. An' the men drop down and get sort of shif'less. An' the Bachmans are selling eggs right along. Mrs. Bachman wants a cow."

"Yes, they spoke to Dan about some kind of a shed place and what the lumber would cost. He thought he could do it himself. I *do* suppose they'd make the cow pay."

"You bet they would," returned Grandmother. "Why don't some of our poor farmers take a les-

son by them? And, Bessy, do you remember that French woman who lived down by the church and made such nice things almost out of nothing? Old country people don't waste a spoonful. There's those Dorans. They're always behind-hand and begging clothes for their children. But they can feed two great dogs, and they've nothing to watch."

"Oh, there's a bit of news," exclaimed Lidie, looking up with a funny expression. "You couldn't guess who has a beau, at least that's the suspicion—Miss Weed."

"O dear!" Bessy laughed. "Is he—well, nice?"

"He's a farmer at Pine Brook with five children. His wife died somewhere about Christmas. He was at the Beers's first, then he switched off. He's taken her out to drive several times. They say the children run wild. Five are a handful."

Marigold had brought her crocheting and was sitting on the step. Now she looked up and said gravely, "And we had eight."

That caused a general laugh.

"Well—yours had a mother. The oldest girl wanted to go in the mill just after her mother died, and she's only fifteen. I s'pose she's eager for her father to marry. Then there's two boys.

So no stepmother can look for much help in housework. And what does Miss Weed know about it, either? She an' her cousin do shop work and get their stint done by mid afternoon, and dress themselves up an' sit by the window so's they can see all that's goin' on, an' it's mighty pleasant. Old Aunt Chatty keeps house for them just for her livin'. There's her three thousand she's gettin' six per cent. for, an' saving up money beside. An' they're in church affairs, an' asked out to tea everywhere."

"Oh, I hope she won't do any such foolish thing," said Bessy Mann very earnestly. "She can take life so easy. And Pine Brook's worse than Denby, I do think. They have church service only every other Sunday. And it would be a hard life when one isn't used to children."

"Well, if she's that silly she'll deserve all she gets," said Grandmother emphatically. "A man like yours 'don't grow on every bush,' as the sayin' is. And you weren't foolish enough to take the first one that come along."

"And Dilly Strong is engaged," announced Lidie. "Steve Morgan and she have been sort of companying for the last year. And old man Morgan's mad about it, and says Steve must work three years longer before he will give him up,

38 *THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN*

to pay for all the trouble he's been. Steve is a nice fellow and he was twenty on Christmas."

"Queer how people feel about that. Children don't ask to be brought into the world and some of them have it hard enough. They ought to be free when they are of age."

CHAPTER III

GOING TO A PARTY

THERE was a rush of three little girls around the lawn.

"Oh, Mover, Amy's got her table all set out, an' Mis' Boyce is cooking dinner for her. Can't we stay?"

"Why, is that Laurel?" cried Lidie. "And Katy Burnham! How rosy she looks!"

"Can't you speak to Grandma and Lidie?" asked Mrs. Mann.

Laurel hung her head, but Katy said:

"How do you do?" in her pretty, precise manner.

"And this is our neighbor, Amy Boyce."

Amy made a little courtesy. Then Laurel held out her hand.

"And where's Rhoda?"

"Oh, her school hasn't ended yet."

"Please, Mrs. Mann, couldn't Katy and Laurel stay and have dinner with me? And Mother has been making some—some——" and Amy's face turned red.

"Pop-overs," supplied Katy. "And they rose up so splendid! And there's some currants and berries and chickens——"

"And Mother's compliments," finding her voice and looking out of wistful eyes.

"Well, well, what a nice lot of little girls!" said Grandmother. "And so you're going to have a party?"

Laurel kissed her mother coaxingly.

"Yes," Mrs. Mann said. "But you had better come home pretty soon afterward."

Then they ran off again, the little feet patting on the gravel path.

"I didn't suppose Mrs. Burnham would let Katy out of her sight," began Grandma. "I thought she was going to take her, but what a child would do at a big folks' meeting except to get awful tired, I don't know. And how bright and well she looked!"

"She wasn't very well that day, so we coaxed her to let Katy stay with us. Amy is a very nice child and is all alone. She and Laurel are fast friends. Katy has too much care and is too lonely. It isn't good for a child to be so much with grown people."

Amaryllis came out to invite them to luncheon. They had to pause and inspect the rooms as they

passed through. Linn had a hearty welcome from both visitors. He was growing into a very manly lad.

"Where are the children?" asked Mrs. Alden. "Cap wondered if they wouldn't like lunch in the playroom?"

"They're having it at Mrs. Boyce's."

"We've traded off," said Prim. "Two old guests have gone, two new ones have come lest we should get lonesome."

Lidie laughed at that.

"What delightful corn-muffins!" said Grandma.

"Rilla made them," announced Prim.

"Why, you are quite a practiced cook!"

"Rilla cooked a good deal in the old house when I had to be out so much," said the mother.

"And you have all grown so, and somehow look different. You've lost the Denby look, which wasn't anything to brag of," and Grandma laughed.

"I'm glad of that," said Linn. "The Denby folks will have to brush up or they will be left way behind."

"They're that now," returned Lidie. "There ought to be an earthquake or something to rouse them."

"What becomes of towns when they get clear worn out?" asked Linn. "That's a funny thought, isn't it?"

"We've read of them," said Rilla. "The people went away and the houses dropped into ruins."

"No one in Denby will have push enough to get away," rejoined Lidie.

"Then some of the adjacent places will come in and swallow them up. The creamery people are building several new houses. Dan and I passed them a few days ago."

"Yes, they really had to find shelter for the workmen."

"And they'll dribble along down. What a host of cows they have!"

"Well, it may be good for us," said Grandma. "They were over and engaged all the spare hay Father had and some of the root crops."

Rilla asked about Mrs. Betts, and if she was still at weaving carpets.

"And finding fault with everything? Oh, yes. Queer how rag carpets have come round. Though they call them rugs now. Prim, I suppose you don't sew any more? You were a master hand at it. And you almost beat me at knitting."

"My occupation has gone," and Prim shook her head drolly.

After dinner they went out to view the garden and the "stock," as Linn called it. Grandma was full of surprises. Then Chan must play. Lidie was really enchanted. Grandma leaned her head down on the sofa cushion and went fast asleep, the music and the children's talk being not in the least disturbing.

"Oh, Rilla, what a lovely life you are going to have!" Lidie said with deep feeling. "All you children, in fact. If I was young as you, I should really envy you. Half the girls in Denby do."

Rilla flushed. "But you are all nice and happy," she returned. "And you were always so good to us."

"We didn't do very much. And Linn was such a nice, willing, handy boy. Why, since then I've often wished I had just such a little brother. There'll be the grandchildren by and by. Real young people are such a pleasure. I don't wonder Mr. Mann wanted you all."

"I hope you won't mind very much, Lidie," Marigold began with a grave expression, "but we all have to go to a party this afternoon. We were asked some days ago. The people haven't any children, and they are going to Europe on Saturday, and they want a children's party, twenty children."

“Well, if that isn’t funny!” exclaimed Lidie.

“We did not know you were coming,” added Primrose.

“Well, there’ll be your mother, and Mr. Mann will come home, and I suppose Father will be over about seven. Why, I’ve been like a real child to-day and had an awfully nice time. No, you must not mind a bit, and I hope you’ll be as gay as larks.”

“If you could stay until we come home, and we could tell you all about it——”

“Well, you’ll come over, all of you, some day. I shall just want to hear.”

Mrs. Mann came to say it was time for the children to dress. Linn had begun already to scour himself, as he expressed it, but it did seem as if Chan was always clean and in order.

The girls came down in their pretty white dresses, each one having a different colored sash, Rilla was certainly growing taller; her mother had had to put a band of insertion in the skirt to lengthen it. They said good-by, and walked off down the street, a pretty group.

“They’re just children to be proud of,” said Grandma emphatically.

Then there was a rush and a warwhoop, and

Tip flung his hat over the hitching-post. "I beat!" he cried.

Rhoda stopped short. "Well, you're a boy and older. Your legs are longer, and that makes the difference."

"You bet that I couldn't."

"Well, I didn't bet anything, so that isn't a real bet."

"You said you could beat me to the post."

"So I could if I had tried. And you'd been mad when the boys laughed at you to-morrow."

"You're an old tell-tale, Rhoda Firth."

"I just haven't told anybody, there! Oh, there's some company on the stoop," and Rhoda walked decorously around the lawn and shook hands with the two guests.

Then three little girls came wheeling their babies along the street. Laurel had hers in a small express wagon Amy's mother had hunted up.

There was a funny confusion for a few moments. Five more children and all talking at once.

"But I'm afraid you didn't have any nap," said Mrs. Mann to Katy.

"But I lay on the sofa, and Mrs. Boyce read some beautiful verses 'bout a little girl going to Slumbertown. And I'm all rested."

"Why, she looks as if she'd been made over," said Grandma.

Rhoda came up and viewed the cortège. "That's Amy's 'spress wagon," she began. "I wouldn't ride my dolly round in it."

"Tain't neder. Auntie Boyce said 'twas a—a something 'lance, and she's goin' to hospital. She's drefful sick. An' she's all covered so no one won't catch it."

"That old rag thing! I'd be 'shamed to take her out."

"You just needn't. I don't want you to. She's mine. And the doctor ain't goin' to let her die."

Rhoda gave a mocking laugh. Laurel followed the other two round to the playroom door.

"Come and swing, Katy," Rhoda cried.

Katy studied her two companions. "I like you best," she said.

"An' we'll have a house an' come visitin' just as we did at Aunty Boyce's, an' play tea, but we don't want anything to eat now. We'll just make b'lieve."

Katy had a little twinge of conscience. Everything had tasted so good to her over here, and she had eaten between meals and been so very happy. But, then, so did Amy and Laurel, and they didn't fall sick. Laurel covered up "dest

dolly" and put her in a far corner; then she set out her small table, and was putting on the dishes, when two visitors came in with their little girls, and there was a great welcoming time. One would suppose they had not seen each other for weeks. Mr. Burnham had gone off to a convention and was to preach a sermon, Mr. Boyce had gone on some business for his store and maybe he would not be home in several days. If her little girl should fall sick she would not know what to do.

"She must go to a hospital," declared Laurel. "The nurses know just what to do, an' they bring them back all well. Saves so much trouble," and Laurel gave a sigh of relief as she poured out make-believe tea.

Then she took her guests around to show them the house. Chan played for them on the piano, and they clapped their hands. Then they went out to see Grandmother and Lidie, when Dan drove round and asked if they didn't want to go with him. And wouldn't Lidie go?

They were delighted, and he helped them in. And just as they drove away Rhoda came flying around.

"That's awfully mean!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't they ask me?"

"You were not here, and the surrey was about full," said her mother.

"But I could have crowded in," passionately.

"You may go next time."

"And now I don't know what to do!"

"Why, you can study your lessons."

That was generally Rhoda's excuse when she was asked to do anything.

She stood irresolute for a moment or two and then went round to find Tip, who had begun an irrigating canal that would lead the water down to his potatoes.

"But why don't you take the hose?" she asked.

"Because irrigation gives you a bigger crop."

"I don't believe it."

"Girls don't know anything about farming."

"Where will you get the water from?"

"I'm going to dig a pond and fill it."

Rhoda went and sat on the back stoop disconsolate. And the others were off having a nice time. She hoped Katy Burnham would go home. But then Amy would be left. And because she was a twin, hadn't she the best right to Laurel?

But the carriage-load had a merry time. They went over to Ridgewood and Lidie would buy some candy. Then they went to Rock Hill where Mr. Peters was raising pigs. There were several

pens and some of the little ones were so pretty that the children were delighted. Their pink skin showed under the white hair and their little curly tails looked so funny as they ran round squealing and nosing for something to eat. In another place there were five little fellows stretched out asleep and they made a pretty picture, if they *were* pigs. Lidie was really delighted.

"Why, they are a sight worth seeing!" she said.

"Don't you suppose Papa would buy one?" asked Laurel. "They're so cunning."

Dan laughed.

"Oh, they're not pretty when they grow big. And they're worse than chickens in a garden."

"But—I'd like to have somefin' that was truly alive."

"I wish you wasn't so afraid of the dog. But now that Bitsy's gone away you might have a kitty."

"I have a nice big cat, but I am always afraid he will scratch me," said Katy. "He catches rats and mice and sometimes birds. But he can't catch a squirrel and that makes him mad."

"But I wouldn't want him to," said Amy.

"Oh, I don't. But he really couldn't. I've seen him try, and then he walks away switching his

tail in an angry fashion. It makes Papa laugh. We don't like him to catch birds, either, but he will sometimes."

Mrs. Boyce had walked down to the edge of the lawn when she saw them coming, and thanked Dan for the pleasure he had given Amy.

"But I must go and get my doll," said Amy.

Lidie was the most enthusiastic one of the party. She had had a splendid day and she should be glad when their babies were big enough to have dolls and come over to Grandmother's.

Amy said good-by, and a few moments afterward Mr. Mann came home, and he had to listen to all the stories, even Rhoda's grievance.

"But you can go out any day," returned her father. "I wouldn't mind. Ask Dan to take you to-morrow."

"But—but Lidie won't be here."

"Then you must go over and get her."

"And I want to see the pigs."

"I never thought pigs could be so pretty," said Lidie. "And Mr. Peters said there were forty-two, and twenty of them were sold already."

"He does quite a business in them and raises some fine stock."

"Are you not very tired?" Mrs. Mann asked Katy.

"Oh, no, I've had the loveliest time! Oh, I wish I could live here—well, when Mamma and Papa want to go away——"

"You surely shall," was the cordial response.

They were hardly through supper when Mr. Briggs came. It had seemed very queer not to have the five other children.

"And you had to go callin' in the neighbors' young ones," he said with a laugh. "I'd like to know what you've done to Katy, she looks so bright an' cheery. They fuss too much over her. They're good sensible people, but I s'pose most folks think their'n a little nicer an' more delicate than other folks's children, but they all want some lettin' alone. An' where did you pick up this one?"

"She is our neighbor, a few doors down the street," returned Mrs. Mann.

"And she's my dear friend," explained Laurel. "She hasn't any twin and we play together. We make believe we are lots of other people. Only we haven't any grandma."

They all smiled at that.

"Well, we've had just a lovely day," said Grandma. "And, Mr. Mann, you have the nicest house and the nicest wife——"

"And the nicest family of children, don't forget that," added Mr. Mann.

Then Mr. Briggs must go out and see how the trees and the garden and the stock were getting along. He thought the flowers quite wonderful.

“But those Bachmans will run you a pretty close race. How they do cover every inch of ground! Your wife was lucky to get such a good tenant. Now why can’t some of the Denby folks take pattern by them instead of lettin’ their gardens grow up to weeds! It must be sheer laziness! But I can’t tell you how we miss that little chap of yours, Linn. He was the willin’est young one I ever see. Beers groans about him and thinks you ought’er let him staid to business. Why is it there’s such a car’less lot of boys nowa-days? Well, I’m glad he’s having a good chance of schoolin’. My! how he’s grown!”

They had come round to the porch by this time, and Mr. Briggs suggested that Mother and Lidie should get on their things so they could get home before dew fell. There were very tender good-bys and promises of renewed visits. Mr. Mann took little Amy home, and she was enthusiastic about her nice time. Mrs. Mann took her three little girls upstairs, though Rhoda didn’t see why she couldn’t stay up and hear about the party. Amy and Katy played with Laurel all the time and she hadn’t had any one—

"Oh, you'll grow better-natured in your sleep," said her mother.

Afterward Mr. and Mrs. Mann sat on the porch in the fragrant night air, which seemed to make music among the trees. Why couldn't everybody be pleased and happy when they had the comforts of life, and be willing to share them with others? It was such a blessed thing to see others happy, to be happy one's self. Now and then he thought of his old life and the contrast made him shiver. True, they had not much money then, but they could have taken some pleasure, made a few friends, and asked some one in to a meal. Bessy had not grown hard and narrow with her struggles. He gave her a tender squeeze, and she smiled in the fragrant dusk. He felt thankful that he had found her and all the children. He was very proud when people spoke well of them. And Grafton had found out they were no blemish to the neighborhood, if there were eight of them and they did have jolly times.

Then there was a sound of eager voices. Dan had gone after the older children. He had some ideas of what was due to "the quality" that he had learned from the Gedneys.

Oh, yes, they had had the time of their lives.

First they thought it was going to be rather stiff, though. There were a Mr. and Mrs. Harford, then two young ladies. And, oh, how lovely their dresses were, all lace and needlework! And Miss Marian Gale had curls all over her head like Goldie's, only her hair wasn't red. She was full of fun and set them to playing games, and then they went outdoors and had the grandest game of tag, and Miss Marian told them some funny stories, and Stuart Bradley insisted that Prim should tell about the Kron, and everybody laughed and laughed, and then they all tried to say *Chrononhontonthologosphorus*, and Mr. Brenner said it made his back ache, and that he had to look cross-eyed. Then they all sang, and then Chan sang alone, and Mrs. Harford came and kissed him, and said it was like a bit out of heaven, and he told about his being in the hospital, and then they begged him and Goldie to do that bird-music. It sounded just lovely. Why, you can't imagine how nice it was!

They had all added their share, and talked together, but the mother of eight children could distinguish their voices.

"I didn't want to go very much," said Linn in the first halt, "but I'm glad now. And when Mr. Brenner comes back, I'm going over some Satur-

day afternoon just to see the curiosities. There are shelves and shelves of them."

"And now you must all run to bed. I'm very glad you had such a happy time." Inwardly their mother hoped they had behaved nicely, but she would not spoil their delight by saying it.

It was fresh in their minds the next morning, and Father had to hear it.

"And one of the funniest things," exclaimed Goldie, "was 'Labor in vain.' Do you know about it, Mother, or Mrs. Alden?"

They had never heard of it.

"Well, it was Miss Marian's get-up. She put us all down on the parlor floor, Turkish fashion, with our legs folded under us. She went round and straightened up our shoulders and told us to fold our arms, and you know how you wait for the next thing to come when you can't even imagine what it is going to be! Then she said, 'Now you may all get up,' and somehow we didn't take it in at first, then she said very solemnly, 'Your labor has been in vain,' and in a second we all shouted. And Rob Lathrop sprang up and caught her round the waist, and said, 'That's a splendid sell, but you can't try it over twice.' And everybody laughed and laughed, even the grown people."

56 *THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN*

Mr. Mann laughed as well. "I've done some labor in vain, but never quite that stunt," he exclaimed. "I think you did have a grand good time. And most people consider the Brenners rather stiff."

"Well, they're just splendid," declared Linn.

The Brenners sat over the remnant of the ice cream and concluded the party had been a great success, "though I couldn't have managed it without you, Marian," Mrs. Brenner said. "But I'd like that lovely Chan and Goldie with her curly red mop, and bubbling over spirits. And what a fuss the people over on the Avenue made about the eight children, as if it was an irruption of the Goths and Vandals! I haven't heard of their smashing windows or tearing down fences or stealing fruit. I hope they won't get spoiled while we are away."

"I believe I could make ever so much money by giving entertainments with four of those children at some seaside place. And can anybody say over that long word?" asked Marian.

They tried and tried and made most ridiculous failures.

"Well, we know what makes earthquakes," said Mr. Brenner. "That child has a brilliant imagination."

CHAPTER IV

LIKE A FAIRY STORY

THERE was a letter to Chan and his mother from Mr. Gwynne. He was having a few days' leisure, and he wanted to see them all very much. Would they take him in over Sunday? And could they find room for his trunk, which he might like to leave?

"Why, of course!" exclaimed the chorus.

"Now, Mother, let's finish my room, and then you will have a nice spare room," suggested Linn.

The walls of the upstairs chamber had been tinted a light greenish gray, and the floor painted. Dan had made a very nice bookcase and Linn had been putting up some pictures, real boy's pictures. There were some shelves also, a few useful things out of the storeroom, and Mr. Mann had promised him a nice desk. On Tip's side of the room were a cot, several boxes that he was to be sure to keep his traps in, a little rocking-chair, and a bureau that the boys were to share together.

"And you must not come over on my part, nor

meddle with my things, understand," said Linn in a big brother tone. "I won't touch any of yours."

Tip looked at his bed, undecided as to whether he would like sleeping alone.

"But you're such a big boy, now, going to school, and you can almost ride Bonnie, and boys like you are never afraid, because I am right here."

"But if I should wake up and see something," apprehensively.

"See here, Tip—the door is on my side and yours is a sort of alcove. Robbers couldn't get in—they'd wake Father. And if any one came up he'd see my bed first, and I'd point my hammer at him and he'd think it was a pistol and run. Then Cap is sleeping in the next room, and it is too warm to sleep two in a bed anyway. Sometimes you do kick so. And you growl like a dog when I straighten you out. It almost frightens me."

That made Tip laugh. His mother talked it all over with him, and Dan thought it would be fine.

Then they put the guest-room in order, with clean window curtains, a span new counterpane, a pretty, fresh bureau cover, and towels with an initial, the handiwork of Amaryllis.

"And Saturday morning we'll put in some lovely bouquets," declared Marigold.

Then there came another announcement.

Mr. Burnham had been asked to preach on Sunday in a church where the clergyman was ill, and they had decided to stay over, though they considered it a sort of imposition to leave Katy so long on their hands. Mrs. Burnham wondered if she would be disappointed. She was such a quiet little body that her feelings might go deeper than one thought.

But Katy simply clapped her hands and danced around, and announced in the cheeriest of voices:

"Oh, I can stay over Sunday and go to Sunday School with you! And maybe they won't come home until Tuesday. Oh, I wish we lived next door to you!"

"I wish you did, too. You are such a sweet little girl," and Prim kissed her.

Saturday morning a big wagon drove up and two men jumped out of it.

"Mann, is that the name?"

"Yes," answered Goldie.

"Here's a note—Master Chandler Firth."

"That's all right," responded Linn, who had come forward. The driver said afterward, "There was a swarm of young ones."

"Well it's a queer-looking trunk!" ejaculated Prim. "It's bundled up like Granny Keen. Say, isn't it some one in disguise?"

The man laughed. "It has two legs and a body and a voice."

Prim and Goldie looked puzzled. Chan was reading his note. It ran—

"DEAR CHAN: I trust you to find a good place for my trunk, and tell your delightful mother that I shall be in time for dinner. Let the men set it up. I have a wonderful story to tell you. H. G."

Linn was surveying it critically. "I saw some queer trunks in New York," he said. "They stand up on end and have spaces with hooks to hang coats and trousers."

"Why, he won't want many coats or trousers to stay over Sunday."

"Perhaps he is going on somewhere else."

"Well, I'm glad he's coming here. And a wonderful story to tell us! Goody! goody!" and Prim danced around.

The men lifted it down. It was certainly heavy. Then they unfastened some straps and pins and lifted it off what seemed a sort of foundation,

and took off some more wrappings. Mrs. Mann came to see what was going on.

"It's all right, mum," and the man nodded. "Now, my men, all together."

They lifted it up the steps, and took off a padded garment.

"Oh, an upright piano!" Goldie shouted.

"You guessed right that time," with a twinkle in his eye. "All these children yours?"

"Yes," said Linn, laughing. "And one more; and nary one of them for sale."

"Well, I declare!" and the man laughed heartily.

"Now, where's this thing to be put? We may as well go through with the job."

"Why, it will have to be in the parlor. The great question is what to do with the other one."

Mrs. Mann looked around helplessly.

"That out-of-date, cumbersome thing! Why didn't you sell it?"

"Because we didn't know we were to have a new one," said Chan. "Mother, where can we put it?"

The men looked around and surveyed the library.

"You could stand it against the chimney-piece. You won't want a fire in the grate right away."

“Well—yes. How awfully big it looks!”

The men rolled it in. It took off the homey look of the room, but it was the best they could do. Then the new beauty was put in its place.

“Oh!—oh!—oh!” Chan just looked. It surely was as handsome as that of the Brenners.

“Yes, she’s a dandy, good enough to hug, only ’twould take most of your little arms to go round her. Did the man send you the key?”

“No,” answered Linn.

Chan walked straight up and kissed it, and the mover laughed, but he drew the back of his hand across his eyes. The boy’s face was alight with rapture.

“Well, I wish you lots of good times with it. You have just the eyes for music, lad.”

Then they turned and wished the group good-by. Mr. Gwynne should have seen them. He would have said he had never made so many children happy before.

“There’s no word quite good enough,” declared Amaryllis with shining eyes.

There was the polished bench and the rubber cover lined with soft flannel.

“Well, it did look funny in all those wraps, and it was crated, too. Just look what a polish! And what will happen next?”

"It's an overwhelmingly splendid vacation. And only a week of it gone!"

They could hardly eat any luncheon. Then Linn went up to take another look at his room. He put the rug over to Tip's side. He wanted it to have a regular boy's look. He liked that picture of the street boys teaching the dog to stand up and beg. And there were the two Greek runners, the fingers of one just touching the bar. They were tacked up; frames looked girlish.

There was a discussion about meeting the train. Should they take the big surrey and the two horses, and how many wanted to go? Well—four at least. Dan would give the little ones a ride first. Amaryllis preferred to stay at home and see that everything was right and straight, and that the chicken potpie would be done at the right moment. "There would be oceans of ice cream," Cap said.

Amy went home. The playthings were put away, and the children had on their white frocks, and sat out on the porch.

Chan coaxed Prim to walk down. She always saw so many entertaining things. A squirrel running down a tree, a little field mouse scuttling along, a group of crickets having a gossip, and no end of butterflies. Chan had a list of beauti-

ful ones they were studying up in books; and he was making a collection.

"I do hate to have them die," declared Prim. "But when the worms and caterpillars eat up your choicest things, you slay them with a good heart."

They had plenty of time and sat there watching the carriages that came down with the ladies in beautiful attire. Many of the summer residents had arrived. Some of them nodded and smiled. "The Firth children are getting to be quite a familiar phenomenon on the landscape," Prim said.

"Well, we don't plot any high crimes and misdemeanors except on our own premises. And I think in my new blue frock I may be taken for some queer Japanese bird such as they put in screens. Are there any red-topped ones, do you remember?" asked Goldie gravely.

There was a deafening shriek, two or three in a minor key, and several grunts, as the engine slowed up. There were Mr. Bradley, Father, and Mr. Gwynne. Several childless men were stirred with envy, as Mr. Mann once had been.

"Well, did the trunk come?" stepping out in the midst of them.

"Oh, Mr. Gwynne! The loveliest thing! We

all wanted to hug it. And Chan really kissed it."

Chan turned rosy red, but the brave front said he was not a bit ashamed.

"And we don't know what to do with the old one. It's in the library."

"I was afraid your voices would get spoiled with it."

"Mine especially," laughed Prim.

They let Mr. Gwynne have Chan and Goldie on the back seat, and Linn smiled as they put in the suit-case. Prim and Linn and their father sat in front, the boy driving.

There was a great greeting from the younger ones and a cordial one from the hostess, but there was a sort of upbraiding glance in her eye and a very mirthful gleam in his.

"Oh, children, do let Mr. Gwynne go upstairs and brush off some of the dust," pleaded their mother. "He is warm and tired."

Linn led the way, and made him laugh as he set down the suit-case and told of the trunk mystery, and the hanging coats and trousers.

Mrs. Mann drew her husband into the parlor.

"Oh, why did you allow him to do such an extravagant thing! Everybody can't care for the children as you do."

"It was done before I knew about it. Wait

until you hear the story. He thinks Chan and Goldie have been of great service to him."

"I don't see how," and she looked mystified.

"He's just as nice as ever," said Goldie. "And, Mother, he is real handsome."

"Oh, child, don't be foolish!"

Then they went in to dinner and were quite on their best behavior at first. The dinner was good, and not fussed up with a dozen different things. Tip looked very earnestly at Mr. Gwynne and inquired if the piano really was going to stay.

"I think it will. It belongs to Chandler and Marigold."

"Did you give it to them?"

"No, they earned it."

"Why, they haven't been anywhere, and I haven't seen them do any work. Have they, Mother?"

"There's a fine story about it. After dinner we'll go out on the porch and I'll tell you. It is as good as a fairy story."

Tip was considering. "Linn," he began, "I wish you'd earn me a flosserpede."

"Well, you *are* generous!"

"Dan can't make one, he said so."

"I'd like to earn myself a bicycle. I'd like to know what Chan did."

"The fairies may bring you one," said his father.

"Not until Christmas," laughed Mrs. Mann.

"Is that the only time the fairies can appear?" questioned Mr. Gwynne.

"Mother said we were not to have any gifts until next Christmas," explained Prim. "I'm making out a list." She wanted to say "golly," but checked herself, and added, "How long it will be!"

The ice cream was elegant. There were a few luscious pears and some big white gooseberries, and Mr. Gwynne enjoyed the feast immensely.

Then he tried the piano. It had such a beautiful liquid tone that they were all enchanted. How his fingers glided over the keys! Chan was in a transport of delight. Amaryllis listened transfixed. Mr. Mann thought she was growing very pretty. Was this the little girl he had picked up on the dusty road and soothed her disappointment about her mother?

Linn recalled the Pied Piper. It was enough to charm hosts of children.

Mr. Gwynne paused a little. "Children," he began, "this piano belongs to Chan and Goldie, and you must bang on the old one. I think we can trust Amaryllis to practice on it. Now don't

you want to go out on the porch and hear how they earned it?"

"And you never said a word," upbraided Primrose sharply, looking at them.

"They didn't know. It's quite a wonderful story. And part of it happened in Germany. Bring out the cushions, and let us take the steps. I'm going to put my arms about Chan and Goldie, for I am not sure but that they are witch children."

"What are witch children?" asked Tip. "Can they fly through the air?"

"I'll see that these don't. Now let us get settled and I'll begin at the very beginning like an experienced story-teller."

It was a magnificent night with the moon just at the full. A soft south wind made broken drifts of music through the trees, and the air was full of fragrance. One could almost imagine it fairy land.

"There was once a man," Mr. Gwynne began, "who had promised a friend he would go to a certain place where they mended poor children, and ask if they would take in a little boy with a bad knee. While he was talking, he heard such an enchanting sound that he thought first it was a mocking bird, but it had such dainty sweet

curves, rises and falls, and the tender melody of the wood robin, so he asked the doctor about it, and was told that it was a little boy who was getting well, singing to another little boy whose life was slowly ending," and Mr. Gwynne gave Chan a fond squeeze. "Then he asked several questions about it, and found he was a poor little lad sent there by a kind friend. This man I'm telling about was a musical director, and had to go at once to a western city, but he wrote to this kindly man to keep an eye over the child until he returned. He went abroad indeed, but all this time the boy's voice kept floating through his brain, and he wrote out little snatches of the melody. He met a young fellow from Tyrol—they are curiously musical—who played on a cornet. Do you know what a cornet is?"

Linn said he had seen a player in the band in New York, but the others shook their heads.

"One who really knows how, can get the most enchanting music out of a cornet. It is a sort of brass horn that takes fingering as well as blowing. Axel Graff was really a genius with some fine possibilities, and he made a bargain with this man to play for him in his training. He was three-and-twenty. Then at Leipsic, the director met another young player and engaged him. They played

at a number of concerts, and really made a mark. Then they came to America."

"Oh, it was you all the time," said Chan with a laugh in his voice.

"I don't tell the story very well, do I? You caught me too soon," and Mr. Gwynne laughed.

"Well, he went to a Mr. Mann, and heard a good deal about the child's voice. He was father to him then, but nothing would induce him to give the boy up, even to win fame. Well, I don't believe I would either, if I had been his father.

"Can you recall the evening I came up here and you and Goldie did that wonderful bit of bird music? The place where Goldie put in the soft, sweet whistle, and then went soaring up like a lark and came down again, and then the melody seemed a dozen birds with what a great poet called 'sweet jargoning.' I asked you to do it over and over, making notes of the melody, and thinking if I could get my two cornet players in touch with it, they would stand in the front rank."

"Oh, what a wonderful man you are!" Goldie exclaimed breathlessly.

"And they used to do it over and over in the old house and no one thought anything of it! And the little plays we used to have, and we don't do anything now!" Prim declared lugubriously.

"Oh, hush up, Prim! Don't interrupt. I want to hear about the cornet," said Linn.

"I hammered away at the strains, and Axel and Hugo spent hours on them. There's a good deal of hard work about music. After a while they caught the inspiration, but oh, how I did wish for you two! I kept writing, altering here and there, going over and over, and asked in a high up musical doctor for his opinion, and was surprised at his enthusiasm. Two days after he wrote to inquire if I would come and bring the two young men and play the piece for him at a grand concert he was giving at a splendid auditorium in a noted seaside resort. It was a fine chance to introduce it, so we went. There was a tremendous audience. One of the noted singers, a great favorite, was listed on the programme, and there was a well-known violinist, besides a number of other first-class musicians. The house was packed, the audience enthusiastic. Then came the turn of my two cornetists. I almost held my breath. I was afraid of some break or mishap. There was a sweet, low warble, then one at a distance, another nearer by, a sort of chorus. I really can't tell how they did it. Then came that beautiful place, and when they finished there was a burst of rapturous applause that was positively deafening. Then at

request they turned back and did it over again. Well, even I was surprised, but these young fellows understood what they were about, and were full of enthusiasm themselves. It really was wonderfully beautiful, and when the concert was over, they had a most cordial reception from the other artists. The next day we were asked to play at an open air concert at Fairmount Park, and to appear at a Musical Festival the next week at Cincinnati, both fine paying affairs. When we came up to New York, I found some friends and patrons had planned a concert there. We had a fine house for summer-time, and it was a success. My young friends have gone into the front rank. I wanted you and Goldie so, but I did not dare send. I should have wanted to watch you two and see the effect of your music, but I could not have spared my eyes or my thoughts a moment. There were two great critics in the audience, and I wouldn't have had an untoward happening for the world. But you shall hear it in the fall. I am to be in New York quite a while then."

"O dear," exclaimed Prim, "I'd like to be Tip a moment and cry. It must have been so splendid!"

Mr. Mann put his arm over the musician's shoulder and said in a low tone, "I saw in

Friday morning's paper—and I wondered a little——”

“I couldn't have trusted myself,” in a whisper.

“I don't see yet how they earned the piano.”

“We were very well paid. Four of us, players, composer, and the two back of him who had the idea—oh, yes, and a good deal of the music. So I put their part in the piano. Axel and Hugo have had some fine offers.”

“But it seems to me if you want them, they should stay with you,” said Linn.

“We have a five-years contract, and they are grateful fellows. Then I keep the score of that bird music and shall not sell a note of it. They couldn't play it without the score. And I sometimes pay a good deal for music just to put in with something else. But you see at present I have all the fame.”

“I'm so glad,” said Chan softly.

“Still you had a good deal of work to do,” insisted Goldie. “And we just sang for the fun of it.”

“Well, it's the loveliest thing,” declared Prim. “To think of earning a piano!” She sprang up and danced down the steps and around the circle looking like a veritable fairy in the moonlight, her arms waving and her yellow braids flying.

74 *THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN*

“There’s a ballet dancer for you,” said Mr. Gwynne. “When I can collect enough wisdom I mean to write a play or an opera just for children. But O dear, you will all be grown up by that time,” and he gave a sort of mirthful sigh.

“Children,” said their mother, “it is time you went to bed, and Mr. Gwynne must be very tired. Oh, I don’t know how we can ever thank you for the enjoyment.”

“It is such a pleasure to know you all. And I want a share in Chan’s future. Such a voice must not be lost to the world.”

There was a host of good-nights, and a clinging of little hands, as if loth to let him go even to slumber.

CHAPTER V

A SUMMER IDYL

SUNDAY was a delightful summer day. All the older children went to church. The service was plain and hearty. Some of the families had gone away for summer trips, others had come in. Mr. Evans was becoming a great favorite. The Methodists had started a small interest in a private house, but there were numerous churches in Ridgewood, and not a few held to their old places of worship.

Several wondered who the tall, fine-looking person in the Manns' pew could be. Mr. Evans had recognized him. Mr. Gwynne was very reverent, but his real delight was in Chan's beautiful voice and in the simplicity of the boy. It seemed as if he was almost wasted in this small place.

Mr. Evans came to speak with them all afterward. Wouldn't he come home with them and take dinner, which they had at noon on Cap's account?

They were to have a guest to dinner, old Mr.

Marshfield. But if they would ask him to supper he would gladly accept.

"You certainly have some nice people here. I enjoyed the service very much," Mr. Gwynne said when they reached home. How quiet and restful it all seemed! The younger ones had spent the morning under the shady trees, alternately agreeing and disagreeing.

Then there was Sunday School. The two men went out for a walk and discussed Chan's future. Mr. Gwynne was very enthusiastic.

"The voice itself needs such a little training. It seems to fall naturally in the lines of the sweetest harmony. So there would be the training in the science of music, and that would be a great pleasure to me. I have started several boys on the way to youthful prosperity. Of course you can never be quite sure how the voice will turn out in the end. One I have in mind is going to be a fine tenor, and has a great ambition to take up the opera. Another, after three years of successful church singing, is going to be a failure, I am afraid."

"So that would be a great disappointment. And Chan is still too young to undertake music seriously. It makes him too dreamy. He is rather slow in real education. Then I do not think he

could be persuaded to leave his mother. They are all very fond of each other, and so far have never been away from home. And I should miss any one of them, especially Chan. He was my first love. And I have never known such a happy year," returned Mr. Mann, with a soft laugh of satisfaction.

"Oh, I don't wonder. You certainly were meant for a family man, if you didn't find your true place very early in life. Why, I should really feel afraid to take Chan away from you all, lest he should pine for the daily love. But I want the first right in him when the time comes. And I should like to try him a little in New York this winter. Mr. Evans said he sang the Easter anthem without the slightest trepidation, which, I think, showed he was thinking only of the music."

"Yes, the music is all to him. You are very good, for you must meet with many fine voices, where people would be only too glad to have them made available."

"But not many with the pure love of music that he has. Oh, Mr. Mann, you must be careful of him, for if all goes well—a fortune is assured. But you *are* right about the education. Every boy needs that to make a fine manhood. And presently he will need to learn two or three lan-

guages. Well, I *do* envy you the child, that's all."

The flock brought Mr. Evans home with them to see the beautiful new piano. And on the way they had been telling him the marvelous story, but Goldie insisted they had not really earned it.

Then after a little while Mr. Gwynne played, and they all sang, though Tip was dismissed in high dudgeon, declaring he could sing as well as anybody.

"About like the peacock," said Prim under her breath.

Laurel climbed up in her father's lap. Katy looked so wistfully at the other knee that he took her also. They had a delightful time with the beautiful hymns. They knew so many now.

"I want the Easter Anthem," said Mr. Gwynne.

"It's so much finer with the chorus," explained Chan, but he looked up the music.

"Mr. Evans and I will be chorus," promised Mr. Gwynne.

Chan went over it quite often. It had grown to be one of his passionate loves. So his voice soared upward with worshipful sweetness.

"Next Easter he must sing in one of the big city churches," the listener thought. And the chorus did very well, and though there were no swelling organ tones, the piano replied exquisitely.

"Oh, I do wonder if I shall ever play like that!" sighed Chan.

"Think of my years of practice, and you have them all before you. The American child wants to step up too rapidly. And there are musicians that play as much finer than I do as you can well imagine. Some day I mean you to hear them. But you are doing very well, only your voice is your finest possession, dear Chan," and he patted the boy's shoulder.

"They certainly are a musical family," said Mr. Evans. "What the twins will do we cannot well determine."

"I wish as a nation we paid more attention to our children's voices. The Germans are far ahead of us in this matter. Most children can sing. They do pretty well in the schools, and then the enthusiasm dies out or turns to coon songs and the like. Sentiment in music is laughed at. Cigarette smoking is bad for the throat, too. And there is instrumental music. In Germany among what we should consider the lower middle-class, nearly every child plays on something and sings. The father has the violoncello, one son a violin, another a flute, another a horn of some kind, perhaps a cornet. Or if they haven't more than two instruments, they join with a neighbor. And on

holidays they go to some small park and have a real concert. The girls sing. They have the true musical enthusiasm, the delight in it for themselves."

Then they were summoned to supper, and afterward listened to Mr. Gwynne out on the porch.

"I do wonder what is going to happen this week!" exclaimed Primrose as the host marched in to the breakfast table the next morning. "There isn't any one to give us a grand party, and Mr. and Mrs. Brenner are on the lonesome 'wide, wide sea.'"

"The sea may be lonesome, but I doubt if the vessel is," said their father.

"Must something always happen, Miss Primrose?" asked the guest.

"Why, it ought. What is vacation for but continual happenings? Then there's the long, weary stretch of school——"

"I like school," announced Rhoda, at which there was a chorus of laughter.

"Well, I don't every day," interposed Tip. "Some days Miss Raynor's cross."

"I should think she might be with so many children," said the mother of eight.

"But we're pretty good," was Tip's rejoinder.

"The great and burning question is whether at home or at school?"

That absolutely floored Tip.

"I think I'll go out and weed the garden," resumed Prim. "That seems to bring about the wonderful concatenation of circumstances, and illimitable series of protoplasms."

"Well, you have swallowed the dictionary to some purpose," declared Linn, while Mr. Gwynne laughed.

Dan came up with the letters. There was one from Mrs. Burnham. They would be home at six Monday evening and come for Katy on Tuesday.

"But we sha'n't let you go," said Goldie, and Katy looked undecided.

"We want you to live here for ever 'n' ever!" exclaimed Laurel.

"And the man's out here with all that truck," said Dan when he could get in a word.

"Truck!" Prim ran to the playroom door. "Oh, Father Mann, what are you going to build now? You've a surprise on foot. I see it in that tell-tale dimple I covet."

"You never get dull here," said Mr. Gwynne.

They all went out. The truck in the wagon looked rather cumbersome and mysterious.

"Drive down there to the apple-tree," said Mr.

Mann, with the arms of Primrose tight about him. "Oh, what it it?" she cried. "It's ugly enough to be a—a—heterogenicon."

"That's just what it is. I'm glad I bought you a dictionary, Primrose. We shall be learned above measure."

The procession followed down to the apple-tree. It was quite large and branching, and gay with reddish apples. And the pieces of timber taken out of the wagon looked like a queer skeleton.

The man began to place them. There were some stout upright posts.

"Oh, that's what you were digging holes for, Dan! I wondered if you were going to uproot the beautiful tree," exclaimed Goldie.

"Not much," said Mr. Mann.

There was an odd little smile crossing Mr. Gwynne's face, and the dimple really did deepen in the father's.

"Oh, I know," cried Linn, as if he was afraid some one would guess first. "It's one of those big swings that look something like a boat and something like a sleigh."

"I've never seen one," said Prim. "But when it was partly up I should have guessed. It'll be just splendid, Chan. I'm not going to envy you the piano."

The boy laughed.

"Now that we have settled the matter, come in, Chan, and let me give you a lesson. For this afternoon I must tear myself away from this charmed place."

There was a general protesting exclamation.

"But I *must*. I have an engagement for this evening. And three open air concerts in Fairmount Park, then Cincinnati, and I hardly know what next,—a whole round of places to show off my two cornet players."

"And what will we do?" lugubriously. "Oh, there's Mr. Collamore's day."

"Mr. Collamore?" Had Mr. Gwynne a rival?

"Little Arthur's father. He is going to take us somewhere for one whole day. Where would it be nice to go?"

"All of you?" he laughed. "There's Central Park and the Museum; there's Coney Island and the shows; there's Liberty Statue and the sail; there is the Bronx and the animals and the birds."

"And the beavers," added Tip. "I was reading about them. They build houses out of mud and slap them hard with their tails. They must be like a paddle."

"They are not the same as muskrats, are they?"

"Oh, no. And their fur is worth a great deal more. Chan, will you come in and take a music practice?"

"O dear," exclaimed Prim, "you've told us so many things we can't decide."

"I'm for the Bronx every time," said Linn.

"And there are the funniest little black bears. They'll keep you laughing. I think I'd take the Bronx. Come, Chan."

Mr. Mann sauntered up to the house. Bessy stood in the kitchen doorway.

"Is there anything else you *could* do?" she began in a tone she meant to be disapproving.

"Why, yes, ever so many things. And I didn't like the swing Dan fixed up. Laurel nearly fell out of it Saturday."

"And they've swung on grape vines and tree limbs, and——"

"Never have broken their noses," laughing. "Now a lot of them can swing together. I'm taking my turn, and when I have had six years of it we'll talk it over again," and he kissed her.

Chan had a delightful time with his lesson. Then Mr. Gwynne called in Amaryllis, who came flushing and hesitating.

"I want you to try the new piano," he began with a smile.

"But—I don't play anything except exercises, and——"

"We'll have some of the exercises then."

"Oh, you needn't feel a bit afraid, Rilla. He's lovelier than Miss Raynor," encouraged Chan.

Rilla *did* mind, but Mr. Gwynne smiled so reassuringly.

"I do not expect you all to be geniuses like Chan. That doesn't happen only about once in a hundred times. But the little German children do their best, and sometimes it is quite hard work for them. Let us have some finger exercises first."

She *did* blunder. He went over them, and she did better. So he said, "Go over the same one five times."

There was no fault-finding in his tone, rather encouragement. The last one was really well done. Then he opened the exercise book and chose a pretty, simple one.

"I could make quite a good player of you," he said. "You have a very nice touch, with no tendency to bang. You can be trusted to do your practicing on this piano. Your fingers are a little stiff, but ease will come in time. You may copy Chan all you can, and do not get disheartened because he will always keep ahead of you. And I think you'll be glad many a time to play for your

father in the evenings. He is so fond of music, and so good to you all."

She raised her soft, grateful eyes and smiled.

"Now you must go on with good courage and practice steadily. Chan will have to do that, even if he does dream out some music."

Primrose came in with a rush.

"Oh, you must see the new swing. It's the splendorous thing! And there are four children in it. There could be six!"

Mr. Mann stood there, the picture of satisfaction.

"That's just gay and festive!" exclaimed Linn.

"An' we're goin' to China," announced Laurel.

"What do you know about China?" asked Mr. Gwynne.

"Why, they have pigtails just like Prim."

"They're not like mine," declared Primrose indignantly. "They're rough black things, and mine are golden."

"But Linn said,"—Laurel looked ready to cry.

"Linn said they had long black pigtails and turned-up shoes and queer shirts that they wore like coats, and ate rats and mice and fish and rice," explained big brother, laughing. "Though I believe I did say pigtails were what Prim wore. Now it's all right, baby!"

Laurel smiled.

"Now what will we do next?" inquired Goldie.

"The next will be luncheon. There is the bell," said their father.

"But we ought to do something special for Mr. Gwynne. We might go to ride," said the girl.

"But I feel very well entertained. Time has not hung at all heavy on my hands. We might get Mr. Evans and go in the church and have some organ music, and then a ride when you take me to the station."

So that was settled. The larger children went over, and they had quite a fair concert. But they couldn't forego the drive, so they went up to the little waterfall, and came down around the little old red house, and told over some of the frolics.

But they did hate to have Mr. Gwynne go. He would be back in the autumn.

"If we only didn't like people so much," be-moaned Goldie.

Mrs. Mann smiled over that.

"And Katy will go home to-morrow——"

"And we'll be left all alone," declared Linn in the most lugubrious tone he could assume.

But they felt tired or lonesome, for they all went to bed quite early.

Mr. Mann was walking round in what Primrose called his "considering mood."

"What is it?" Bessy asked presently.

"I was trying to find the best place for the old piano. Now here is this sort of reception room that is only a passage-way after all. At least we don't use it for anything else. If this part of the partition were taken out the piano could stand here, for when winter comes we want the unrestricted use of the library. I should have thrown that small room into the hall, as after all you have to go through it to get to the dining-room. So if we were to take out the partition on this side, we would have a nice space for the piano, and I think the end of the hall would be really improved."

"I suppose so," rather hesitatingly. "You seem to be finding something all the time. Think of the dirt and confusion it will make!"

"Half a day to tear out the partition, and a day perhaps to put up the arch to give it a sort of finish. We'll think it over. But, you see, the piano can stand here, quite out of the way and very handy for the children.

"Oh, the children!" She smiled, but there were tears in her eyes. "Don't you suppose the new one really *was* a gift from Mr. Gwynne?"

"He has made a good deal of money out of that music, and will make a great deal more. You see, it is so new and really wonderful, the way those cornets play it. No other instrument could do it in that fashion. I do suppose we'll have to give Chan up to music, he has such a love for it. Mr. Gwynne thinks he has a great genius as well. And a little boy he picked up in the street four years ago is making money enough for his whole education."

"But—I am quite sure Chan wouldn't go away from us"—in a hesitating tone.

"Not now. Sometime one and another will go out of the dear old home circle. We will have a few gay, bright years with them that will be nice to remember. And I am just selfish enough to be glad to have them through these years, rather than will the money to some Orphans' Home when I am done with it, for that is the thing that does appeal to me strongly. And we'll have each other and happiness in the end, though maybe Amaryllis will stay with us always. She's such a sort of home girl."

"You are so good to us all——"

"And have lots of pleasure and fun for myself." Mr. Mann's voice was the least bit shaky. "I feel as if I had just begun to live when I came

up here to Grafton. And the second chapter was the children, a good long one that will be."

The next morning there were some more happenings. A letter came from Mrs. Burnham in which she said they need not expect her until Wednesday, and then she would have some surprising news for them. She hoped Katy wouldn't be disappointed and make trouble, and that she had kept well. She wanted to see her very much, she had never been away from her so long before.

Katy took the news very calmly, saying:

"Oh, then I won't have to go home to-day! And we can swing and take journeys and play tea, for at home I sha'n't have any one to play with, and it's so lonesome."

Then there was a letter for Mrs. Alden, the housekeeper, from her son, who had gone to live at Rochester soon after his marriage. His wife's aunt had made her home with them until a few months before, when she had married a second husband, a well-to-do farmer. There had been a second baby added to the family, and Clara, his wife, had not been at all well since. And now he wanted his mother to come out and make a good long visit. They missed the other mother so much.

"I made them a visit three years ago, soon after the first baby was born. They were very

comfortably fixed and he was on a fair salary. I felt they did not need me, and anyhow I was well and not too old to earn a bit of money for myself. The other son is out in St. Louis. I do suppose I ought to go," rather reluctantly.

"We shall miss you very much," began Mrs. Mann.

"But you really do not need me. I've been thinking of this for some time. Cap is so capable, and occasionally grumbles because there's not enough work to go round, she declares."

"You have been such a friend and adviser. My life was so different. I should hardly have known how to manage in this wider sphere. You have made matters go so pleasantly. And see the help you were in the sewing. No, I shouldn't agree to your going in any other case. Why, you have been like a sister."

"And you have been cordiality itself. This is the happiest home I have ever had. Mr. Mann is so fond of children. He used to speculate on adopting some before you came. Yours are so amusing and entertaining, and I do believe the best I have ever seen."

"Oh, I think there are a good many nice children in the world, or would be if they had a fair chance. Nagging is so bad for them. And they

were so nice and cheerful in the little old house, so ready to help, and to do without things they really needed at times. I hope they will turn out well. And you must feel sure of a welcome when you want to come back, just as if you were a relative."

"Thank you for that. It is most kind of you. I know very little about my daughter-in-law, but I never shall find a happier home than this."

"And if matters are not to your liking you must come back. I know Mr. Mann will say so."

Then Mrs. Alden went to her room to pack her trunk. It did not seem to her that she should stay longer than the summer.

Cap and Mrs. Mann talked the matter over. "Of course I will help a good deal more," the mistress said.

"Now, Mis' Mann, you needn't count on the work lagging. 'Ceptin' Monday an' Tuesday there isn't enough to keep me busy. Why, I've three patchwork quilts done an' I thought, if you didn't mind, I'd set 'em up on the frames an' quilt, for days are so long an' I've so many afternoons. I wasn't brought up to sit an' chew my thumbs. Y'see, I'm thinking some of a house of my own, though I won't have no such a provider as you," and Cap laughed. "I'm 'fraid I'll be 'most spoiled

with such full and plenty of everything. An' I don't want you to feel put out if sometimes I should pinch a little, for I don't want to get into wasteful ways."

"That is very good economy and good sense as well," and Mrs. Mann smiled.

"To be sure there's the dogs and the poultry to eat up what's left, but you don't need to feed 'em on cake an' pie, an' chicken breast. Dan's sensible, too. I declare if I wer'n't engaged to Abe I'd be havin' my weather eye on Dan. They all thought he was a big fool to marry that half-witted thing, but if it hadn't been for him she'd ended her days in the poor-house, when that p'ral'sis came on. And he an' his mother were as good as gold to her. Well, it'll seem kind o' queer without Mis' Alden."

Then Cap went to her ironing. The children's everyday gear was always plain, but Cap took great pride in the "pretty things," and worked away cheerfully, as the luncheon was generally simple. Amaryllis attended to the beds and the dusting, and then took her hour's music practice. The others were out of doors, mostly, though Primrose was very fond of sewing on the machine.

Mrs. Mann told Amaryllis of the impending change.

"Oh, how much we shall miss her! And it has been so nice to have some one to tell you all manner of pretty ways, not only to do things, but to say them. It's been almost like a governess, hasn't it? And now I'll be glad to help with the house-keeping. I almost wish I didn't need to go to school."

"But you do," said the mother quietly. "Father wants you all to have a good education."

"And it was just lovely in Mr. Gwynne to want me to go on with the music so that I could play for Father. For I shall always stay at home with you," twining her arms around her mother's neck and kissing her.

"Yes—he is so fond of that soft, sweet music."

"And the new piano is just delightful. I thought at first I never could get any decent fingering, but he said so few could play as Chan does and that I must not be discouraged. He is so nice and friendly."

Goldie was banging on the old piano, improvising, trying to make some bird-music; Prim was out of doors in the new swing, taking journeys with the children to various countries. They *did* get mixed, fruit and animals roamed out of their natural habitat, and various funny things occurred. They crossed deserts, and just as they were dying of

thirst, found an oasis with palm trees. And as there were no stones to throw up, some one had to climb the trees to get the cocoanuts so they would have something to eat.

"You can't climb a palm tree," said practical Tip. "They're straight up and down until you get to the very top. There's pictures of 'em in my joggerfy."

"You've left out two or three syllables."

"Well, you can't climb a palm tree."

"You can do a great many things in this world when you have to," Prim declared with spirit. "And we had to have something to eat. Only the whole thing is make-believe. If you can't see it that way, you must get out of the caravan."

"You should have brought along a giraffe. He has such a long neck he could have reached up."

Then they met some robbers and had to hide in the sand. After several other adventures, they were called in to luncheon.

Mrs. Alden's journey was announced then, and there were very honest lamentations. They all said, "But you're coming back as soon as the lady gets well."

It was delightful indeed to find them all so cordial, and Tip said, "You were almost like

96 *THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN*

Mother that night I saw the bear. And you didn't scold a bit."

"The night you didn't see a bear," corrected Chan.

"Well, it looked like one, anyhow."

Katy went to take her rest. Prim sewed for a whole hour. Then they went down to the end of the lot to what they called the woods, and played several out-of-door games. They found some pears that had fallen, and made believe they were cocoanuts. And as they were coming up to the house they saw Dan with something in his hand that he was stroking gently.

"The poor little peahen is dead," he announced.

"Oh! oh!" cried the children, huddling round.

CHAPTER VI

POOR MRS. PEACOCK

PRIMROSE ran down the path as she saw Mr. Mann coming.

"Oh, Father," she cried, "Mrs. Peacock is dead!"

"Mrs. Peacock?" in a puzzled tone.

"Well, Mrs. Peahen, then. Though I don't see what resemblance there is to peas."

"Oh, poor little thing!" he said pityingly.

"He was ugly to her. I suppose he was ashamed of her and her plain attire while he was so big and grand. Of course he was magnif' when he spread, but he wouldn't do it hardly ever. And he used to peck at her."

Prim was leading him down toward the poultry houses. There on a board lay poor little Mrs. Peacock, while the younger children were grouped around. Laurel was patting the feathers and saying, "I'se so sorry you don't live any more."

"Yes," Dan said. "She was droopy all yesterday and the old fellow kept picking her, so I took her out by herself. But she wouldn't eat,

and just ruffled herself up. So I looked a while ago, and the poor little thing was gone."

"Well, we can't bring her back to life," was the response.

"I think she was just tired of living," said Prim. "And he was an ugly old thing! Don't they ever go in flocks and have some companionship?"

"You'll have to look that up, Prim. There is a queer story about some one who was turned into a peacock and his many eyes set in his tail so he couldn't spy upon his neighbors."

"Oh, I must find it. Dan, let us bury poor little Mrs. Peacock, and put up a monument to perpetuate her husband's unkindness."

"Does he seem to regret her?" asked Goldie.

"No. He went and clawed her a little, and then I brought her out. He's turned into a grumpy fellow, and I think he's getting old."

"Do you suppose she's gone to heaven?" asked Tip, who had been considering.

"Why, I never knew about any heaven for——" And Primrose was quite nonplussed.

"When they die this way, like people. Of course when you kill them and make them into a potpie, you'd know that was the last of them. But when they've been good and nice——"

Mr. Mann smiled at the boy's reasoning.

"We'll have to read up and see if we can find anything on the subject. And Mr. Ross asked me if I would like to sell the old fellow. He has a friend who wants to buy one. I dislike their horrid scream. I don't see how the neighbors could stand it, and the guineas with their clack, and the half a dozen cockerels beginning in the night, and the mourning doves——"

"What do they mourn about?" inquired Goldie.

"I really don't know. It's a very melancholy noise, and I told Dan to sell all those fancy things. Mr. Gedney wasted a good deal of money on them. I like children better," and he hugged some of those nearest to him.

"Do you know what the guineas say?"

"When I was a boy, part of them said, 'Go back, go back,' and the others answered, 'To Guinea, to Guinea,'" and there was a twinkle in Mr. Mann's eye. "The chicks were very pretty, and back-country folks think the hens keep hawks away. We've raised quite a lot, haven't we, Dan?"

"Yes, about three dozen. The farmer from Long Neck bought fifteen."

"Children!" called their mother.

They rushed into the house eager to announce Mrs. Peacock's demise, but Mrs. Mann said:

"Get yourselves ready for dinner."

They had to recount the loss to Mrs. Alden, and if General Peacock could have heard and understood the strictures upon his character, he would have made the neighborhood hideous with his dissent.

"Let us take a vote as to whether he shall be sold or not," proposed Mr. Mann. "If he missed his meek little wife and grew more cranky, we shouldn't want to buy him a new one. Dan says he has a trick of running away and trying to bite. Laurel is afraid of him."

"But she's such a 'fraid cat, anyway!" declared Tip with disdain.

"Ain't 'fraid of kitty," interposed Laurel indignantly.

"Well, Linn and Amaryllis?"

They both thought he might as well be sold.

"What's your vote, Chan?"

"He's handsome and adds a variety to the landscape. I admired him so much the first day we came. It seems rather hard-hearted."

"But he has to be shut up most of the time. There isn't hardly room enough for him. And this man has two acres of lawn and a duck pond."



"I'm on the selling side," announced Goldie.
"He's an old Turk."

"That is my sentiment to a fraction," added Primrose.

"An' he might bite me, 'cause he teared my frock," said Lal.

"Would there be money enough to buy a goat?" asked Tip. "I'd rather have a goat."

"And he'd frighten Lal out of her few wits," declared Rhoda. "I don't want a goat."

"Oh, can't we have anything at all?" and there was a vexed cry in Tip's voice.

"A goat might prove very troublesome," said their father.

"I wouldn't drive him round the garden. I'd build a house clear down to the end of the lot, and take him out that way. I'll never be real happy until I get a goat."

"We'll see what the peacock will bring."

"And they can live on paper and a little grass. They don't want corn and—and the things the chickens eat. I'll cry every night if I can't have a goat."

They all laughed at the threat.

"We must read the stories over again," said Prim as they went to the library. "Why, see here. The peacock's tail is the emblem of an

evil eye, and a traitor. And though the King of Egypt set Argus to watch Juno, he shut her up in a distant palace and proclaimed himself king. Mercury marched against him and took him prisoner and liberated the queen, who set his hundred eyes in his tail when she transformed him into a peacock, so that he could never see what was going on in front of him."

"There's the other story," said Chan. "Juno being jealous of Io, set Argus to watch her, but found he was not trusty. So being angry, she transformed him into a peacock and set his eyes in his tail."

"Did he really have a hundred eyes?" asked Prim, glancing at Mr. Mann.

"I've never counted the beautiful tail feathers."

"And we don't like spies," declared Amaryllis spiritedly. "Neither do we know anything good about Argus. Do you remember that little Jack Cary at school who was always nosing round to see what you had in your desk and telling tales? I think he was Argus-eyed."

"He was a mean little skunk," declared Linn.

"I want a book about wonderful birds and their countries. Flamingoes and storks, and birds of paradise, all those curious things. I'll put it down for Christmas," said Prim.

"And we ought to have a funeral and bury Mrs. Peacock. She was so meek and gentle, and waited until the old fellow had his pick of everything. We must put up a stone to her memory."

"Oh, Prim, you must say some verses over her."

"I thought the mantle of poesy might fall on some of you, and I could be allowed to retire to a back seat."

"We made some verses at school," began Rhoda eagerly. "I helped."

"What are we coming to?" laughed Linn. "I think I'll get a drum and beat an accompaniment."

"What was it, Rhoda?" Chan inquired in a friendly tone.

"Why, it was about Davy Mears. You see, his mother was very mad because Tip fought him. And we just said bits with ourselves, and the day he came after his books we said it to him when he was outside the gates. Cary Lane began it."

"Well, let's have it."

Rhoda turned very red.

"Davy Mears cut off his ears," began Tip. "Go on, Rhoda."

"Davy Mears cut off his ears,
And hung them up to dry;
And all the girls began to laugh
And he began to cry."

"Poor Davy! I don't wonder," said Prim.

Chan patted his little sister's shoulder, for she looked rather uncertain, and said, "Now let's begin——"

"Our poor little hen
Lay dead in the pen——"

There was a silence.

"And may be the old fellow killed her," added Rhoda.

"He's mean and he's cross
And he'd been no great loss——"

"But there's nothing to rhyme with 'killed her,'" said Goldie, looking intently at the group, and they all stared at each other, then went off in a fit of laughter.

"I was reading the other day of one of the great poets who wrote his verses over and over again," said Chan. "And we're not great poets, but we may come on by degrees. There are some obstinate words that won't rhyme."

"But a man found a rhyme to Tim-buc-too and won a bet," exclaimed Linn.

"That surely is a poser," said Mr. Mann.

"I don't see how he could," mused Chan, perplexed.

"It was in Stuart Bradley's scrap-book. He

has a lot of funny squibs. I mean to have such a book to paste in queer things. This was the run of it:

‘If I were a cassowary
On the isle of Timbuctoo,
I would eat a missionary,
Bible and hymn-book, too.’”

“Children, you seem to have accumulated a lot of miscellaneous wisdom,” said their father gravely.

“Prim, what is a casso—something?” asked Tip, glancing eagerly in her face. “I thought it was only heathen cannibals that ate missionaries.”

“Oh, you must think I’m made of knowledge inside and out and have it on the brain. You must study——”

“I don’t believe there is such a thing,” interrupted Chan. “We’ll see what the dictionary says,” and he pulled down the big book.

“Yes, here it is. A native of Java and Malacca. The next largest bird to an ostrich, which it resembles, but it has a horny top-knot on its head. Yet I don’t believe it could eat up a man.”

“Little children,” began their mother, “you must go to bed. Katy and Laurel are both nodding. And you, too, Tip.”

The boy gave his father a rather drawn-out hug and whispered:

"Can't I have the goat by Christmas?"

"I'll see," was the comforting reply.

Linn was very good to his little brother, and saw him safely to bed.

"Please don't get a goat," besought Mrs. Mann. "It would frighten Laurel out of the few wits she possesses. They have their fine swing, and can go driving nearly every day. And Dan's built a track down to the end of the lot for Tip's train. They'll want the moon next."

"I'm not much in favor of a goat," he returned dryly.

Mrs. Alden came in, and they made arrangements for her journey. She would go to the city the next morning with Mr. Mann, and he would see her safely started on her way. She was loth to leave the household, for she had been deeply interested in it and very happy in their cordiality.

Amaryllis came and put her arm softly about the lady's neck.

"We shall miss you so," in her sweet, longing tone. "You have taught me so many nice ways, and I am very grateful. You seem like a real relation, and it's rather odd, seeing we have none

to compare you with. I think friends may be just as dear, don't you?"

"I should like to be your own aunt," in a tone of emotion. "I do love you all sincerely. I feel quite as if I were going among strangers. So you see relationship isn't necessary. You must write to me. I'd like all of you to," with a tender smile.

"I surely will, and I know Mother will as well. And in your letters you must give me good advice, as you do here."

They were rather subdued at the breakfast table, and the children cried over the good-bys. Mrs. Mann was much moved, and said in a tremulous tone:

"Remember you will always be welcome here. You have been like a sister to me."

Then the girls went about their daily duties, coming out to the kitchen to have a little talk with Cap, and express sorrow afresh.

"And we must all take hold and do our share so as not to miss her too much," began Mrs. Mann, but Cap interrupted her.

"Now you needn't worry a mite," in her cheerful tone. "If you'll see to things a little Monday and Tuesday so's I can get through with the ironing, I can shoulder the other days. And if

Miss Rilla will make desserts part of the time——”

“We have so much nice fruit and berries,” interposed Mrs. Mann, “that we ought to use them as much as possible.”

“To be sure. And there’s Miss Rilla’s music and bimeby they will all be off to school. Why, I have lots of time now for sewing, and at home Pop would look in and say, ‘Cap, there’s that onion bed that wants weeding, or the turnip bed, or, stake up them ras’berries that are tumblin’ all over.’ Why, he’d get a conniption if he see me settin’ on the back stoop readin’. I’ve time and to spare,” and Cap threw up her head with a laugh. “We uster think it would be a great thing to have some boys to help. Now let him set them to work. An’ no naggin’ an’ scoldin’. I do pity poor Phene. But they don’t get me back now, I tell you! I know when I’m well off an’ savin’ up money! So now don’t take on any trouble ’bout the work. Mis’ Alden was as nice as anybody could be, but you’ll see we’ll get along all right.”

Cap had improved in various ways. She was not so boisterous, and she had given up much of what Mrs. Alden called the “outlandish talk.” She was adding her “g’s,” except when she was in too great a hurry, but she couldn’t resist being

funny. She declared she was glad enough they were going to sell the screeching old peacock, for she'd always heard they were unlucky.

"So far we have had no bad luck," returned Mrs. Mann.

"Well, may be it hasn't come round yet. But I do hope and pray it won't, for you don't deserve it. You're always thinking about what's nice for other folks."

Mrs. Mann smiled. Why shouldn't she, when all this love and prosperity had come to her?

Dan summoned the children to see about the funeral. He had made a small box and lined it with some paper napkins and laid Mrs. Peacock carefully in, and dug the grave under the great Iamarque rose.

"Primrose, you must say some verses over her," began Goldie. "She isn't a heathen, for she doesn't know anything about what folks believe. And she was good and sweet, but I wish she had not been so meek. Though I don't know that we can say any real prayers over her."

Laurel went down for Amy. They coaxed their mother to come out, and Dan placed the box reverently in the grave. Then the children scattered flowers over it, and Dan glanced up. Primrose began in a low tone:

“Our poor little hen has gone to rest,
And we drop sweet flowers over her breast;
We hope there will be some beautiful place,
Where birds can go and enjoy all grace;
With no one to worry, and all is fair,
With fragrance and sunshine everywhere.
Good-by, Mrs. Peacock, we loved you well,
To each other your praises we'll often tell.”

Then Dan filled up the grave and the children covered it with flowers.

“I just know she's gone to heaven, for she was real good,” said Laurel with her eyes full of tears; and no one controverted her.

Then they slowly dispersed, the little ones gathering round the swing and beginning to plan some wonderful journeys. They went to New York and put Mrs. Alden on the train, then to stores where they bought piles of things that had to be sent out by express. They rode up and down in a queer cage and had some make-believe cake and candy. Then their mother called them in to lunch.

Prim washed them and brushed the tangles out of their hair, which really did curl, to her great satisfaction. Rhoda had begged that hers might be all sheared off, but her father told her she would have to stay in the house during vacation while it was growing out again. She did snip

off one curl, but when she had had to stay in the room alone for one day, she promised over and over that she would not attempt it again.

Laurel was telling her mother about the beautiful imaginary trip and the dolls and play-houses, "an' we came down in a queer thing that a man had fast of a rope,—an—an alligator."

Rhoda gave a scream of laughter.

"'Twas so now. Chan said it was," turning very red, and swelling up.

"I wonder it did not swallow you all up," commented Goldie.

"There," began Prim as Laurel's eyes filled with tears, "you had it *almost* right. It is a big word for a little girl—*elevator*. But it goes down in a well, and comes up again, and almost swallows people. And you might call it an alligator."

Then she caught Rhoda by the arm and gave her a little shake.

"Now, if you tease Laurel, I'll ask Mother to keep you in the whole afternoon. It *was* funny."

That concession mollified Rhoda a little.

"Mamma and Papa are coming pretty soon," said Katy. "Please, Auntie Mann, can't I stay up all the time? I didn't run a bit this morning and I'm not tired."

"Why, yes, I think so," was the smiling answer.

"Are you glad to go home?" asked Linn.

"Well, I'm glad to see Mamma and Papa, but it isn't so nice at home, because I'm alone. There are no little girls nor any nice swing. If we could all live here!"

They felt sorry for the little girl, and said so in chorus.

"Oh," and Katy's face brightened. "Wouldn't it be nice if I was twins like Lal and Rhoda! Then one could stay here all the time."

"Well, that is an idea!" exclaimed Chan.

"Which would you rather be?" asked Rhoda.

Katy glanced from one to the other, flushing a little.

"Well," she answered slowly, "you've been to school most of the time, and I know Lal the best. I guess I'd leave the Lal here, but maybe Mother'd want her, so—so——"

It was embarrassing to admit that she loved Lal the best. Amaryllis came to the rescue.

"I am afraid your mother would want both," she said with a sweet smile. "We couldn't give up either of ours."

"I shouldn't want to be Lal!" exclaimed Rhoda, bridling her head. "She can't go to school——"

"She's going when school opens again," interposed the mother.

"But the children will laugh at her crooked words——"

"She won't have any by that time."

"You think you're so smart, Rhoda," said Linn. "Now here's a little sum in addition; see if you can do it. One and one and one and one——"

"Oh, you go so fast!" interrupted Rhoda, breathlessly. "Why, you can't keep the run of them. If I had a pencil——"

"Like Alice, she can't do addition. And she's been to school all summer."

"Don't tease," said their mother.

"Miss Raynor doesn't do it that way."

Rhoda had half a mind to cry.

"Alice couldn't do it and she was in Wonderland," said Rilla consolingly.

"If you are as smart as I take you to be,
You'll run up a ladder with A B C,"

sang Linn, leaving the room.

"Now, children," began their mother, "you may run out and play a while. There comes Amy."

"We do miss Mrs. Alden," said Rilla, as she helped put the room in order. "Not just about the work. I think Cap is quite eager to do more,

but Mrs. Alden was always ready to say some nice little thing to comfort you, and settle the children when there were disputes."

"She has been an excellent friend to us all. And I hope she will be happy in her new home, though I think she went mostly for duty."

Mrs. Mann used to wonder now and then if she had crowded her out of any happiness. But there were the children. Mr. Mann had wanted them.

Rilla went to her music. She was beginning to like it very much.

CHAPTER VII

A DELIGHTFUL HAPPENING

KATY was torn with conflicting emotions. She wanted to see her parents, but she shrank from the lonely house. Even if she had the splendid swing, there would be no one to talk to nor run about with. Dolls were nice to be sure, but they were not real folks. If there were only a little neighbor like Amy!

Mrs. Mann hadn't the heart to send her in for her rest. They played about, then were washed up and put in their white frocks, and sat out on the porch.

Squire Briggs came trotting along with his big gray horse and wagon. Mrs. Burnham waved her hand, and there were joyous exclamations.

Mr. Burnham sprang out. "Oh, Papa! oh, Mamma!" exclaimed Katy, with a glad cry and shining eyes.

He caught her in his arms and held her up to her mother. Mrs. Mann was welcoming them both, and they all gravitated to the porch, while

the Squire drove down to the barn. There was a great confusion of happy voices.

"Was Katy homesick or troublesome? Why, what have you done to her. Her cheeks are pink, and she's grown fat. I never saw her look so well."

"And we've so much to tell you," said Mrs. Burnham. "We've had the nicest time. I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much. And I'm almost bursting with good news. But I must speak to the children. Bessy, what a pretty frock! And how Linn has grown!"

Mr. Burnham sat on the top step with Katy in his arms. "I don't know how we can thank you enough," he kept saying. "Why, she looks like a different child. I think we could not have left her with any one else and felt so comfortable about it. And you've had a happy time, Katy?"

"Oh, it's been splendid!" sighed the child.

"Now you must hear our news," began Mrs. Burnham. "Such a delightful thing has happened to us. Husband gave one of the talks at the second missionary meeting, and there was a little tea reception. Everybody was so cordial and interested. Some people from Oaklands were over, and he was asked to come and preach for them on Sunday. We heard afterward that they had

been rather unfortunate, first with a young minister who had a fine call elsewhere and stayed only four months, then with another who was threatened with consumption and went to Colorado. Oaklands is only five miles distant, a pretty town with about three thousand people, and is beautifully kept. This Mr. Warner, one of the deacons, invited us to spend Sunday with them, coming on Saturday afternoon with the carriage, though there is a train. In the course of the evening Mr. Warner said he had a half-brother whose name was Everett and who was a professor in a Western college, and he felt the more friendly on account of the name. Then it came out that the two Everetts had been college-mates in their youth, so we felt like quite old friends. Husband preached morning and evening, and after that there was a meeting of the trustees, and it was quite late when Mr. Warner returned. They had had a confab together, and they wanted a minister who wouldn't consider them a stepping stone to something better, but who would remain with them for years. They had liked both sermons very much, and were to hold a meeting Monday evening and proffer him a call, if there was a possibility of his accepting."

"Oh, I hope he consented," cried Mrs. Mann eagerly.

"It was all so cordial and pleasant," said Mr. Burnham, "but I was quite surprised at the suddenness. It was a unanimous call, and I did accept when they came to lay it before me. We *are* very tired of Denby."

"Husband went there six years ago with a great deal of enthusiasm," said Mrs. Burnham. "He thought he could lift up the people, and at first he did awaken some interest. Then most of the women went to doing shop work and saving up money. Two nice families moved away—you remember the Sayres and the Dunnings. And no one comes in."

"A new clergyman may stir them up a little. But I feel too young yet to drop into a rut. Oaklands people are quite progressive. They have a library and a fine town hall, and there are three different denominations. And some good schools. Then there is a nice parsonage and a garden. The salary is fair, but the other advantages are worth considering."

"Oh, I am so glad for you," and Mrs. Mann's eyes shone with pleasure. "Denby drops down every year. Why, it was much more promising in my youth. The Dunnings had some ambition."

"The creamery folks will stretch out and swallow up the people. It will make a good grazing

country. I've been troubled about Katy, but there is a nice school near us. She does want to be with other children."

Katy had been putting in snatches of talk. There was the splendid swing and Mrs. Peacock's sad story. If he would only come out!

"I wonder if you will excuse me a little while," he said to the ladies. "You two can go on discussing the matter without me. Mrs. Mann, you have worked a miracle with Katy. We can never be grateful enough."

"It is due to the children mostly. I'm glad of the change for her sake. You know mine have been used to taking life as it comes," and she smiled gayly.

They scattered some fresh flowers over the little hen's grave. They called on the General, who gave two or three hideous screams. Dan and Squire Briggs were examining the fruit crop. Chan had been going over the road with Tip and his train. He stood up so straight and looked so rosy. The children had come to have so many grown friends that they felt at home with them.

And there was the swing that was boat and train as well, and made journeys all over. They insisted the minister should take a trip with them, but before they had reached California, the dinner

bell rang long and loud, and Mr. Mann was walking down toward them.

"Why, I had no idea how the time was going!" exclaimed Mr. Briggs. "You're a real farmer, Mr. Mann. You ought to have acres and acres."

"Oh, give Dan most of the credit," laughingly. "It's a good big place for the children to play in."

"And it shows what play can do," responded Mr. Burnham.

There was truly a tableful, and Cap insisted she should do the waiting, acquitting herself creditably. It was quite a delightful reunion.

Mrs. Mann had coaxed to have Katy stay until the next day, when Dan would bring her over with a load of children.

"Then you can get your house quite settled," said Mrs. Mann. "And you'll be tired enough to-night without any extra care. You will stay until to-morrow, won't you, Katy?"

There was quite a struggle in the child's heart. "Oh, Mamma," she cried, "if I was twins, you could take one home——"

"What an idea!" laughed her father, kissing the sweet lips rapturously.

The children were so exigent that she stayed.

"We shall almost want to take Mrs. Mann with us to our new parish," said Mr. Burnham on the

way home. "Who would have thought she could grace a home like that and adapt herself to the delightful household ways? And little Chan! He is going to be a fine singer, and has a really lovely face."

"But she always was different from most of the Denby folks," said his wife. "I do suppose Mr. Firth was above the common run, as people say. And the great charm is her simplicity. When we are settled we must have her over and introduce her to our new parish. You could take her anywhere, and she would never seem awkward. What a wedding it was! And I am as glad of it as our good fortune. But wasn't it a bomb thrown into the Denby camp!" and she laughed heartily.

"She's a woman out of a thousand," put in Mr. Briggs, who was on the front seat. "Well, Grandmother Chandler was a lady, and Bessy used to teach the children manners. She must have been born with it. And she's got a splendid husband. She deserved him, too."

Mrs. Burnham almost shrank from the plain old parsonage that they had improved and beautified with their limited means. Her heart was joyful at the thought of the new home and the new people. It had all come about so simply.

There was a Friday night prayer meeting this time quite well attended, for the minister would bring home something fresh about other people. But they were moved with a sort of dull amazement when he said at its close that he had a matter to lay before them, and spoke of the change he had decided to make, and that Sunday would be his last day with them.

“Well,” said old Deacon Lane, “mebbe ’twill be a good thing for us, too. Brother Burnham has been kinder oneasy, wantin’ people to get roused up an’ do somethin’. I like goin’ straight along. Church is good enough, we don’t want a new one, and we do get his salary paid, though it comes mighty hard on some of us. We better get a young man who don’t ask so much.”

Dan took the big surrey the next morning, and crowded in six children, who had a merry time, and a nice ride around. Katy was sorry when it came to an end, but her mother said she should go over and make another visit soon. Then they went to the Briggs’s, for Grandmother would have felt slighted if they had not. And they must go up the lane and see the little old Red House, which looked bright and cheery enough with its happy family. There was some more news when they came back. Mrs. Bradley had been over with

Stuart, who went out in the garden and talked to Linn.

They always went away for two or three weeks, and this time a cousin had offered them a cottage that was going to be vacant for a fortnight at Rye Beach, up the Sound, where there was splendid bathing. They would have room for one guest, and they had settled upon Linn. They would go early in the ensuing week. Mr. Bradley would come up every night, and Mrs. Bradley said she would take as good care of Linn as of her own boys.

Of course Father would have to be consulted, but they would all take it as a compliment. Mrs. Bradley was very sweet and cordial, and Mr. Bradley would come over in the evening to discuss the matter.

"Well, what will come next?" demanded Goldie.

"There's going to be a picnic sometime."

Linn thought he would like to go very much. You could see way up the Sound, and though the beach was a plain enough sandy stretch, there were some nice rides and rambles inland, and boats for rowing. The boys were going to take their bicycles.

"You ought to have one, Linn," said his father.

"But I don't know how to ride. We've been spoiled by horses," laughed the boy.

"You could learn, I suppose."

"I do not believe I could in these few days. But I do think I'd like one when we come back. A number of the boys ride."

"It seems funny to balance yourself on one wheel," said Prim. "I'm going to learn to ride Bonnie."

"And there are four legs," appended Goldie.

The bicycle came and a side saddle also. Mrs. Mann suggested that it wasn't Christmas.

"But, you see, no one asked for them," with a twinkle in his eye and a deepening of the dimple.

Tuesday seemed to come very soon, and Linn had two bruises and a very limited knowledge of balancing and guiding. Tip took to it easily and began to wonder if he would not like it better than a goat. But to ride Bonnie—that would be the summit of happiness!

They said good-by to Linn. His mother did not give him much advice, but only said, "I think I can trust you, my dear boy."

They were to go to New York and then take a steamboat up the East River and the Sound. It was new and wonderful to Linn. They passed Hell Gate, that had been shorn of most of its

terrors, past islands that had been vague to him, and paused presently at a landing. There was a short walk and a man to carry up their luggage. Further on up the beach there was a funny row of small cottages, but theirs was rather more imposing. It stood upon several posts, and had a little stoop of four steps. Why, the little old Red House was much larger! But there was a large room with a kerosene stove and a sink in one corner, a gray hemp carpet on the floor, a table, some chairs, and two commodious closets. Adjoining was a room with two bedsteads, a big old bureau, and two washstands. Then there was a garret over it all with two beds in that.

"It's not very stylish, Linn," and Mrs. Bradley smiled. "My cousin offered it to me a while last summer, and I was afraid she would be affronted if I declined this year. She is a very nice body, too. And your father said you might learn to swim—I think every boy ought. And we are going to keep house by ourselves. You boys must help."

"There's no wood to split—I can do that first-rate. And I've wiped dishes, and swept, and boiled eggs, and toasted bread——" began Linn.

"I think you will do. The boys were very eager to go out camping, but I thought them too

young to take good care of themselves. And you will find this near enough camping out," with a gay sort of nod.

Linn had read some stories of boys going out in the woods and leading a sort of Robinson Crusoe life. But it was only for a little while. And somehow he liked the view of the great Sound. The small river at home was not a very stirring prospect.

"Now you must help me unpack the boxes. The eatables will go in this closet. Here seems to be a good supply of dishes."

Stuart looked them over and made a wry face.

"Regular restaurant things!" he exclaimed rather disdainfully.

"People can't be refurnishing this kind of a cottage for every tenant, when breakages occur so often."

"Linn, what are you laughing at?" inquired Dick.

"It was only a smile. Why, lots of people use such dishes. At Denby they only get out their best when they have company."

"There will not be any best when we have company."

"Some one must get me a pail of water."

"Come," began Stuart, "let us go out and reconnoiter."

It didn't look a bit like Denby, though it was plain enough. There was a long row of bathing houses, rather shabby, but there was the sloping beach and the sparkling tide running up, leaving the sand spread with sparkles like gems, and way over the other side you could see the point of Long Island, and up northerly the hazy shores of Connecticut. Yes, it was curious and Linn was interested. There was a procession of people walking up and down, and throngs of children.

Mrs. Bradley lighted the stove and washed up part of the articles, then put her kettle on to boil. She had brought some nice cold meats and relishes, and really the table looked quite inviting.

CHAPTER VIII

AS GOOD AS CAMPING OUT

THE boys sat on the stoop looking down the street, as it was called by courtesy, and making invidious remarks.

“ There’s sights more fine at Ocean Grove. Of course it costs more, and Mother felt sort of duty-bound to come here. Oh, hello! There’s the stage!”

All three of the boys started. Mr. Bradley had to go to the city to finish up some important business. Then he took the train, which the stage met at the station. They greeted him as if they had not seen him for a week.

“ Well—are you homesick? ” in a mirthful tone. “ Isn’t it enough like camping out? ”

“ Oh, Mother has had several quite stylish calls. Why, the women are rather jolly, and seem to like it. There are swarms of children.”

Stuart took his father’s suit case, and they soon reached the cottage.

“ Did the woman come? ” he asked of his wife.

"Yes. It's funny how they do. She'll give me three hours Thursday morning and get the dinner three times a week. That's what she did for the other tenant. But we didn't expect hotel living. If I don't find fault," and a queer little smile finished the sentence.

"We ought to learn to cook," said Linn, "and take turns. We don't need to make bread, but the biscuits were lovely this morning. I can bake pancakes to a turn. Why, Mrs. Bradley could lie in the hammock and tell us. Then if we were cast on a lonely island, we would know what to do!"

"Where would you get your stuff?" asked Stuart.

"Why, off of the wrecked ship, of course. And there might be bananas growing."

"Thank you, Linn. You boys may try it the first rainy day."

The supper tasted good. Dick said they were feeling the benefit of the sea air already, for he was as hungry as a tramp. It did seem rather funny to have no one to wait on the table. Linn wondered if Mrs. Bradley really enjoyed it; everything was so dainty and attractive at their house. It brought the old life vividly before him.

"Suppose you leave the dishes, and go out for

a stroll before dark," said Mr. Bradley. "There will be a small moon, but it will not do us much good, yet next week it will be fine."

Mrs. Bradley put away the food, and they locked the doors, so they would be sure no tramps would come in and lay violent hands on their breakfast. What a crowd of people there were, to be sure! Stuart made a sudden plunge and captured two boys.

"The Disbrows, Mother. Oh, are you all here?"

The boys shook hands with the party.

"Oh, yes, the whole crew. Aren't the cottages funny and queer? We have one of the biggest and we're crowded at that. May had to come for sea bathing, and father said he couldn't afford the stylish places for such a crew. I'm glad to see you. Bathing and boating are fine. Do you boys swim?"

"We do," replied Stuart. "This is one of our schoolmates, Linn Firth, Dick's compeer in the Grammar."

"You know I'm taking a course in a business college. Uncle thought it wasn't worth while for me to spend two more years in the High. He's going to take me in the Bank the first of the year."

"Father thinks he'd like me to graduate and go to college. And I *do* love to study."

"I didn't. I want to make some money. And Fred is going into an electrical house, has a first-class chance. What's the use spending six or seven years before you can earn a cent? Then there are three girls to look after with us, and you two boys can have it all."

Fred Disbrow had fallen behind with the younger boys. He was fifteen and tall for his age, and had just graduated from the Grammar School. He had a fine reputation as a ball-player and general athlete.

"Come down and see the folks, Mrs. Bradley. It is only a few steps farther on. Mother will be just delighted. Are you going to stay any length of time?"

"Only a fortnight."

"Oh, we're booked for the rest of the summer. Rather queer place, isn't it? Not rich or stylish."

They turned off the main street. The cottage was quite large, and the porch had a hammock at both ends. Two little girls were in one, Miss May in the other. Mr. and Mrs. Disbrow were sitting on the step. The lady sprang up and greeted the visitor warmly.

"Let us go up and find some chairs——"

"Oh, no, let us take the step," insisted Mr. Bradley. "We are just out sauntering, not expecting to find an acquaintance. Here are my two boys, and their friend."

"May, come down and see the Bradley boys. This is a queer, independent place where you don't have to put on any airs—good for people of moderate means with big families. We had to have seaside and bathing for May. The children grow too fast, though it hasn't seemed to hurt the boys. She had a cough all last winter."

May was quite tall, pale, and thin, but she brightened at the pleasant greetings.

The Bradleys and the Disbrows had been neighbors for several years, but the latter had moved into Ridgewood. Mrs. Disbrow was a fair, rather pretty woman with an easy chatty manner that was very friendly. May came and sat on the step just above the boys.

"This is Linn Firth, I suppose. I've heard a good deal about you all. I didn't go to school last winter nor even in the spring, but the girls talked about you. And one of your sisters was so funny, they said. I hope I'll get well enough to go this winter. It's poky staying at home. I went to my aunt's at Saratoga and drank milk and stayed out

of doors, but I got awfully lonesome and my cough didn't get well. Then the doctor said I must have baths. It's quite fun here, and I have learned to swim."

"I want to," said Linn.

"Oh, it's easy enough," appended Roger. "I learned when I was a little shaver. It seems to come natural to some children."

They soon fell into a free and easy chat that May kept interrupting rather crossly.

The ladies, meanwhile, were discussing household affairs. Mrs. Bradley had given both of her maids a fortnight vacation, for she knew there would be no room for them in the cottage.

"What they want here," said Mr. Disbrow, "is a big summer hotel with medium prices. Many of the people are transients, and poor as the cottages are, they seem to find tenants. There are some restaurants. The fishing is fine, and they know how to cook fish."

"But surely you can find some kind of help!" subjoined Mrs. Bradley. "The boys wanted to go camping, but I considered them rather young to be sent off alone. I thought this might answer. I suppose we could take some meals out?"

"Oh, are there no women who come in by the day?" asked Mrs. Bradley.

"Why, yes. Mrs. Meade had a very capable one. She works for several families by the day,—Catharine, a country woman from somewhere around. They won't be considered servants. We brought a maid. Then the vegetable man comes in every morning, the butcher and the oil man. It is a good deal like camping out, but you live out of doors so much, and then, as I said, visitors don't stay very long. There are some teams, as they call them, that will take you out driving, and there are some beautiful roads around here where the quality live," laughing.

Mrs. Bradley was anxious to know where she could find Catharine. They said they must go presently.

"You'll all be down to the beach in the morning?"

"Oh, yes!" answered the boys enthusiastically.

The moon was making quite a glow now, tinting every wavelet as far as they could see.

"It's just glorious!" declared Linn. "I don't believe the ocean can be any finer."

"We might take a trip out to it some day."

"Those Disbrow boys are almost young men," said Mrs. Bradley. "I don't think they have really improved. I used to consider them nice. I'm rather glad they will not be in school, though

we can't choose mates for our boys. Linn is much more of a gentleman."

"That is true."

When they reached home the stove was lighted and the water heated.

"I'll wipe the dishes to-night," exclaimed Linn.

"And set the boys an example," laughed their father.

"It wouldn't be fun for you to wash dishes all the time, Mother," commented Stuart.

"I don't quite expect to. In camping out every one takes turns," with a ready smile.

It was quite late, and the boys went up to bed. Linn kept thinking how queer it must seem to the boys who had everything so nice at home, wondering a little if they really liked it. And oh, what were they doing at *their* home with all the crowd?

The dawn was magnificent. The boys sat and watched the sunrise, with all its glowing colors and the Sound stretching up and down, suggesting the outlet to Europe. Mr. Gwynne had been there. So had Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. Some day he might go, and he smiled. Why, he had not even seen Niagara, or the romantic St. Lawrence!

"Hillo!" exclaimed Dick, bouncing out of bed.

"Are you listening to the music of the spheres, the splash of the Sound, in plain prose?"

"We had better go down and look after Mother. It's going to be rather hard on her. I don't believe I'll coax her to go camping. Boys don't mind a bit of roughing. Oh, there's a delicious smell of coffee."

They hurried down, and made a hasty toilette. There was a dish of toast, scrambled eggs, and their mother looking fresh as a rose. There were merry greetings. Through the open window they saw throngs hurrying down to the water's edge, and you could hear the fun and laughter.

They ate their breakfast, and it was good. The fish-man came with a tempting array, and the farmer with vegetables. The house was put in order, then the boys and their father went out. Many had taken their early bath, but there was still a crowd.

"We'll go in a little while," said Mr. Bradley.

Linn waded out with them. The sand was soft and warm, and the water seemed to hug your very feet. The brothers were off like a flash. Oh, how easy it looked! The Disbrows were in the crowd treading water, floating, diving, until it looked as if they would never come up again.

"Don't go out very far, Linn. I'll take a turn

or two and to-night we'll have a swimming lesson."

"No," returned Linn.

He waded about and enjoyed it, ducked his head a time or two, and studied the changing picture, when it seemed suddenly as if he was bowled over. He had been watching a long wave gather the little ones in its arms, never dreaming of the force, when it struck upon his thighs and drenched him generously. He scrambled up, and was soon out on the sand. May Disbrow stood there.

"Can't you swim a bit, not even a stroke?" she cried in a teasing tone.

Linn colored, then laughed.

"No, I've never tried. You can't really swim in a little pond. Mr. Bradley is going to teach me."

"The boys are fine swimmers. Splendid boys, too. Maybe if they had a lot of sisters they wouldn't be so fine!"

"Why?" in an astonished tone.

"They never are. Have you any sisters?"

"Five."

"Oh, good land! Older than you?"

"One is. And she's sweet, too," in a positive tone.

"Aren't some of them a nuisance?"

"No," returned the boy stoutly. But he did think Rhoda was, sometimes. "Have you been in swimming?"

"No, I go in late in the afternoon when the water is warmer. I have a warm salt bath and—well, I suppose we must be polite and call it massage in the morning at home. I'm here for health," laughing.

"I don't see how they can float——"

"Oh, I can. But I can't tread water."

Mr. Bradley was coming back, and nodded as he said, "Don't you swim?"

"Oh, yes, in the afternoon. I think I *am* growing stronger. I want to get real well and have some fun. It's so tiresome to have them all saying, 'May, don't do this, don't do that—you've walked enough' and so on. I just hate being half sick."

The boys came out, and ran down to the bath-houses to dress. The others walked slowly along until Mr. Bradley rejoined them. The Bradley cottage was near, so they said good-morning.

"She looks ill," said Linn, "and so thin."

"Yes, she is poorly. Well, I suppose sea air is excellent. But your folks don't seem to need it," laughing.

When the boys rejoined them, Mr. Bradley

proposed a walk to see if they couldn't hunt up something for a drive.

"Isn't there anything I can do for you?" asked Linn of Mrs. Bradley. "I've peeled potatoes for Mrs. Briggs when I was there last summer."

"No, you go for the walk. Some other time I'll be glad to have you. Thank you, all the same."

They had a rather queer walk through a sort of lane, and found a farmer who would let them have his two-seated light wagon. And they brought back a great bunch of wild flowers.

Oh, how fine the fish was! And the flaky biscuits, the fresh cucumbers! There were pears for dessert.

It was pretty warm, but the sun went under a cloud, and they had a very enjoyable drive. For a mile or so it was sand and scrubbiness, then they passed the railroad and turned into a wide handsome street, with the houses set far enough back for a double row of shade trees. And the most beautiful beds of flowers and leaf plants! The houses looked like palaces.

"Grafton seems fine to me," declared Linn, "but this is superfine. Why, the barns are handsome enough to live in! And the trees and flowers!"

"Grafton is for rather plain people with mod-

erate means; this is for millionaires. I'm glad some people have the money to spend this way," returned Mr. Bradley. "It is a great pleasure to look at it. They can afford plenty of servants to keep their places in order. And yet they do not live here half the time. But it is nice for the servants."

"What are you laughing at, Linn?" queried Dick.

"I was thinking of the queer little cottages down on the beach, and what fun the people had, and how good the breakfast tasted. I suppose these people would think we had barely emerged from barbarism. Well, we have some nice times."

"Bravo, Linn," exclaimed Mr. Bradley. "It is a great thing to take pleasure in what you have. Not that I decry what money brings,—journeys and pictures and famous places, yes, and famous men and the gratification of high-up education. These people ought to be very happy, but they often have too much, and are sated."

The road wound round with a slight ascent. It was indeed a splendid settlement of wealth and beauty. Then they reached a lovely lake, made more picturesque by two pretty bridges. Some children were being rowed about. There were several swans and splendid imported ducks in gor-

geous plumage. Birds were making a dazzle in the air, and filling it with music.

"It's like taking a journey abroad. We can almost imagine it Italy," said Linn.

"Without the castles," laughed Dick.

They took another way home, "round the block," Stuart said, and came to a pretty little city where there was a fine business street, a bank, a post-office, and a court-house. But the stores had an air as if they belonged to the better class. Then they passed small farms and dwellings. You could see the Sound and the people gathering on the beach. They drove round to the farmer, who gave them a great bag of pears. Mr. Bradley paid his bill, and they preferred to walk home.

Mrs. Bradley sat there with several new acquaintances. Children were playing about in the sand, others walking decorously with nursemaids.

The boys dropped down beside their mother, and treated her to the pears, which were delicious.

Then came up the great boat crowd, and the rush for the bath-houses. There were the Disbrows and their aunt.

"I think we better take our swim," said Mr. Bradley. "Come, Linn, and have a lesson."

The boys ran off to change their clothes. Linn did feel a little backward. If all these people

looked at him! But he hadn't the courage to back out. And everybody seemed to find so much fun in it. But O dear! the strokes went wild, and when he raised his feet he toppled over and swallowed at least a quart of dirty salt water, he thought.

Mr. Bradley was a very kind trainer, but it seemed quite dreadful to Linn.

"You are afraid, my lad. Just let yourself go a little. You can trust me."

Linn made two desperate efforts, then begged Mr. Bradley to go and have his swim, and he would wade around the shore.

"I'll keep him company," said a laughing, teasing voice. "I'm not allowed to swim very much so I can't lead him into danger."

May Disbrow caught his hand, and in ten seconds Mr. Bradley was way out in the Sound.

"Let's race up and down. It seems so funny to me that any one can't swim. We used to on our nursery floor, and learned all the strokes. And when I was four years old, we were at the seaside, and in no time I was swimming like a fish. If I were a man I should be a sailor. Come."

They ran down, holding hands. The tide was going out. Two or three more joined them, laugh-

ing. This *was* fun. Then they raced back. The rows farther out raced back also. Two or three stumbled and there was a shout of merriment.

Roger ran up. "You've been in long enough, May. Hustle out and get dressed. You don't seem to have any sense!"

"I've not been in much. I have as good sense as you, any day!" she retorted.

He gave Linn a careless nod and was off.

"You wait here," she said to Linn. "I'll be back in three shakes. What a nuisance to have every one ordering you about!"

"I suppose I'm sharp with the children sometimes," reflected Linn. "Tip is trying—and Rhoda. But they're not ill or weakly. It doesn't sound nice, though, to be so gruff."

When she returned, Linn sat in the sand, hugging his knees and smiling at the gay crowd. She dropped down beside him.

"Tell me about your folks. Are you very rich?"

"No," replied Linn frankly.

"But there are so many of you children. Five set Mother 'most crazy."

"My mother is"—yes, he would say it—"the sweetest mother in the world."

"Oh, my mother isn't 'specially cross, but

there's always something to fret about. And the boys are so bossy. Roger puts on a lot of airs. He wanted to go down to Ocean Grove, but Father said we should all keep together this summer. When he gets into the bank and earns his own money, he'll be the grand Panjandrum with a button on the top."

"What's the button for?" laughed Linn.

"Well, I suppose an ornament. The Bradley boys are nice, ain't they?"

"They're just splendid," said Linn enthusiastically. "Have you been ill long?"

"I had a fever a year ago and I don't know what else. I'm not so very ill, but I don't get well. And I was so strong. Oh, I could do anything! Tell me where you live."

"On Linden Avenue. Mr. Gedney used to own the house."

"Why, they were quite grand! All the children went to boarding-school. And the daughter's all crippled up with rheumatism and has to go about in a wheel-chair. And Mr. Gedney's lost about all his money."

"I'm very sorry for her," said Linn.

"Well, they were a kind of stuck-up crowd."

The others had finished their swim. Fred Dis-



“TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FOLKS. ARE YOU VERY RICH?”
Page 143.

brow rather hustled his sister away. The Bradleys sat and rested a while.

"Did you hear what those men were talking of?" asked Dick. "There's going to be a fine race of the yachts to-morrow. The New York Club will be out. I'm glad you are going to stay to-morrow."

"Yes, I saw it in the paper. And I am glad for you to have the chance. But, then, they do occur quite often in the later summer."

"And now let us turn our steps homeward and get our supper," said Mrs. Bradley.

"No, we'll try the restaurant to-night," rejoined her husband. "Come, boys, and escape washing dishes."

They gave a laugh and followed.

CHAPTER IX

HOW RHODA BEARDED THE LION

THE house at Grafton seemed positively lonesome. No Mrs. Alden, no Katy, no Linn. Mrs. Alden had reached her journey's end and found matters in bad shape. Both mother and baby were very poorly. The maid was incompetent, the nurse rather ungracious. The little girl was bright and merry. If Mrs. Alden could borrow Cap for a fortnight!

Tip and Rhoda came home, and Rhoda couldn't see why she couldn't have her share of Amy, which meant detaching her from Laurel.

"'Cause you've had her all summer."

"Summer isn't half gone," said Primrose.

"But I haven't any one to play with."

"You and Tip must think up something."

"I'm going to work on my irrigation," and Tip marched away.

Even Dan was busy spading up some ground. Rhoda cleared up her shelf in the playroom; she practiced reading in a very tragic manner, and thought herself badly used.

But in the afternoon when Laurel slipped away, she had her innings. The little next-door girl was out with her doll, riding it up and down. She wore her prettily trimmed white frock. Rhoda still had on her gingham. They didn't have their frocks changed till almost dinner-time. She put her doll in the carriage and went round the drive. There were pretty iron fences between the lawns, but none on the street. Gladys was down by the end of the lawn.

Mrs. Chedister had felt secretly mortified that she should have been so hasty in her judgments. The Firth children were recognized by the neighbors. Mrs. Brenner had given a party for them. The Bradleys and the Austens had called, and Mrs. Greer had become quite familiar.

She wished she had not been quite so outspoken, and she did venture to nod stiffly. They went to church at Ridgewood, so that could not bring them together.

Now Rhoda waited for Gladys to return.

"Come over on my walk," she said.

"I can't," but there was a longing look in her eyes.

"Why?" in an insistent tone.

Gladys hung her head a little and colored. "Because—because——"

"We shan't hurt you. We have a lovely swing. You can see it out of the window."

"Mamma said I must only go to here," marking it with the toe of her dainty slipper.

"You go past sometimes with her."

"Well, every one can walk on the sidewalk."

In her heart Gladys knew what the prohibition meant in the beginning,—that she was not to play with the rude Firth children. The girl with the red curly hair had spoken to her, and she did wish she could be allowed to go in their yard.

She was slowly turning her carriage around.

"Your mother couldn't keep me from coming this way. Can you go past the other fence?"

"Oh, yes, 'way down——"

"Then let's."

Gladys stood uncertain.

"What's your doll's name?" Rhoda asked.

"Augusta Victoria. She's past two years old. I didn't have any new one Christmas. I had so many. I'm 'most tired of them. I had a pretty new silk frock."

"I don't care so awful much for them. It was because Laurel had one. And she has an ugly old rag doll that has to be made over. She takes it to bed with her sometimes."

"She's your little sister?"

"Well, it's queer. She's my twin, if you know what that is. But she's littler, and she can't say all the words plain, and she's never been to school."

"I haven't either. Miss Hurst comes every morning to teach me. And the other little girl, who went away?"

"Oh, that's Katy Burnham. Her father's the minister where we used to live—Denby."

"And there's Amy Boyce——"

"I don't like Amy very much. Laurel takes all her time. I'd like to have a friend to myself. I have one at school."

"But you have such good times."

"You see, I am at school all the time. Now it's vacation I want a friend."

Mrs. Lawton passed and spoke to both girls in her cordial manner, and turned as if to enter.

"Mamma isn't at home," said Gladys.

"Oh," and she gave the child her card, saying, "I'll go in and call on Mrs. Mann."

There were two intervening lots before the next house. There were two little girls playing "follow master."

"Oh, Rhoda! Oh, Gladys! What lovely dolls! And they talk! My mamma said they cost too much for her to buy. Oh, come and play visiting."

Rhoda made her doll walk and talk. Grace Bond wanted to be the nurse.

"Oh, if you were all at my house we'd have tea in the playroom. Cap gives us bread and cake and bananas sliced up, and milk that we make believe is tea."

"Oh, could I come some day?" cried Grace Bond, while Mamie Hall looked wistfully. "And play with your beautiful doll?"

"Why, yes, almost any time."

The make-believe visit wasn't quite such a success as the Firth children made of it. But Gladys was getting quite acquainted.

They did not notice a lady coming up the street, until she stopped.

"Oh, Mamma!" and Gladys sprang up with a scarlet face.

"Why, you're having quite a party here," she began in a pleasant tone. "Mamie, I've been calling on your mother. I suppose your party isn't finished yet, so go on with your play."

"I think I'll go with you, Mamma," but the child's voice had a tremble in it as she reached out her hand.

"Why, no, Gladys, you all look so sociable that it would be a pity to break up the quartette. When your play is finished, you might stop on the porch

and have a piece of cake and some bon-bons," loosening the child's hands.

"You see," explained Rhoda frankly, when the lady was out of hearing, "she hasn't liked us very well. There's so many of us, and we came from such a queer old place. But we've made lots of friends, and do have such good times. We have the loveliest swing. Oh, Gladys, don't cry! Let's play something—tag."

Gladys winked very hard. Then she threw her arms around Rhoda and in a quivering tone exclaimed, "I love you. Oh, I do love you!"

"I'm ever so glad. Let's stand in a row and then see who can reach that big tree first. The dolls will be safe."

Rhoda did have some generous impulses when she was at the head. She let Grace Bond beat, and they tried over again. Then they were quite merry. When they saw a handkerchief waving from the porch, they picked up their dolls and went thither.

Mrs. Chedister had spread a white cloth over the table, put on four pretty plates, some sliced cake, and a dish of attractive candy. She greeted them cordially.

"Now, run through to the lavatory and get

your hands washed, and then have a piece of cake with Gladys," she said pleasantly.

It was very cordial indeed, and Rhoda said, "We're obliged to you for the nice treat, Mrs. Chedister."

"I thought it would refresh you, though I hope you didn't play hard enough to get tired."

They were a little shy, and Gladys somehow felt so amazed. Mamie and Grace had seen Mrs. Chedister in her calls at their mothers' homes. Rhoda rather led the talk, which was mostly about vacation. Then Rhoda rose and said they must go, and thanked Mrs. Chedister for the very pleasant time. "And please, if you could let Gladys come in Saturday afternoon, and I'll ask Mamie's mother and Grace's mother if they can't come, for we have such a beautiful big swing, and Father said we must ask the little girls to come in and enjoy it."

"Thank you. Yes, Gladys will be pleased to come. Grace and Mamie too, I think."

Then they made their adieus. Gladys watched them a minute or two, then threw herself in her mother's lap, exclaiming, "Oh, Mamma, I couldn't help it. Rhoda would come! And she's nice——"

"Gladys, don't be silly!" said her mother sharply. "Those Firth children were dreadful in the be-

ginning, but they have improved, and Mrs. Greer said they did very well now. I did wonder at Mrs. Brenner asking the whole crew over there, but she's always doing queer things. Grace and Mamie are nice playmates. There! go and lie down, you're tired out," and she almost gave her a little push.

Gladys went upstairs and threw herself on her pretty white bed, and did have a good cry. She wondered if her mother was really in earnest. She had such a longing for companionship.

Mrs. Chedister thought the episode rather fortunate. The Firth children *were* in favor. Mr. Chedister spoke very highly of Mr. Mann. Certainly they were not pushing people.

Rhoda went home in high feather.

"I've got a new friend," she announced triumphantly. "And it's Gladys Chedister. We've played together with Grace Bond and Mamie Hall. Then Mrs. Chedister gave us the cutest treat on the porch. Cake and candy and a peach. And I've asked them to come Saturday afternoon. I want something real nice."

"Well, I must say!" ejaculated Primrose. "Why, you'll soon be top of the heap! Giving parties without saying so much as by your leave."

"Well, Lal does, and Cap gives her goodies."

"Let us hear about it," began Amaryllis.

"Mrs. Chedister must have had a change of heart."

"Hush, Prim. Now, Rhoda, tell us how it happened."

Rhoda was proud of her exploit, but she did not embellish unduly, though she could hardly remember all she had said. "And Gladys is ever so sweet, though I think she is afraid of her mother. And now I've got a nice friend for all vacation."

"I've been very sorry to live next door and only pass the merest nod, though the men have been quite friendly. And the little girl cast such wisful glances over here. But, Rhoda, you might have inquired if it was convenient," said her mother.

"Well—I had to ask them that way or not at all. And Grace Bond goes to school at Miss Raynor's."

"You can have your old Amy Boyce," she said in her grandiose tone when she met Laurel. "I've got a friend who is ever so much nicer, and has such pretty frocks. I wish Mother'd put lace and things on ours."

"Well, you can have her. I don't want you to have Amy."

"And I'm going to have a party on Saturday afternoon, and I shan't invite her."

Laurel threw up her chin and walked away.

Mr. Mann was much amused when he heard the story after Rhoda had gone to bed.

"Of course I shall let them have the party, after I have impressed upon Rhoda that in such cases *I* must be consulted. I don't want her to grow up so dominant."

"Oh, she'll find presently that she doesn't own even half the world. She has a great deal of character. She should have been a boy."

"Oh, think of two such boys! Why, she and Tip would set one wild!"

Mr. Chedister said Rhoda ought to have some reward for breaking the ice.

"It's foolish for you women to put up such fences when people are really nice. And as far as money goes, I do suppose Mr. Mann is very prosperous, and he has a big supply of real good sense."

"But we didn't know what his wife was going to be. They might have been awfully vulgar and pushing. And the marriage *was* queer. Then Denby people do not stand very high. The children did act like wild Arabs. We thought they

must be some city institution crowd. That Prim raced like a wildcat."

"I want Gladys to mix with other children. She's a prim little woman with no childhood to look back on with pleasure. She ought to run and laugh and be glad over all sorts of nonsense, and know what other little girls are like. Well, boys, too, don't hurt. That Linn is very kind to his sisters. The Bradleys think he is a fine boy."

"But I do like pretty manners and you must lay the foundation in very early life. There is no need of an awkward age if you train a child properly."

"Well, I fancy she's been trained over much. Now let her go a little. I think we ought to send her to school in the fall."

"I could not think of her in that rabble at Miss Raynor's. She is well enough with Miss Hunt. I wish there were about half a dozen nice little girls to join her," and the mother sighed, wondering if she could find them.

But she must hit upon some plan to excuse her remissness. It had been natural enough: no sensible or refined person would rush headlong into an intimacy with a stranger about whom one only knew that she had come from a very common country village.

She found her opportunity the next morning when both women were down in the garden looking at some ripening fruit.

"I think I ought to apologize for my remissness in not being more friendly," Mrs. Chedister said in an appealing tone. "I am not one to rush headlong into intimacies—you are not at all sure your neighbor would desire it. And, then, I do keep very busy. I have a very good maid, but I look after the ways of my household. I do most of my sewing, all my little girl's clothes, which is one of my greatest pleasures. I do like to see children prettily dressed, and having but one I suppose I *do* spend a great deal of time on her. Oh, how do you manage with so many?"

"They must go more plainly dressed. They do outgrow everything so fast and much of it gets handed down to the next one. Then I have had such an admirable helper in Mrs. Alden, who was called to her son's, because his wife is in very poor health."

"She seemed such a nice ladylike person."

"She was all of that. I shall miss her very much, and she was like a second mother to the children. My girl is very efficient and the man ready to do anything. So we manage," with a gentle smile.

"I wondered if your little girl had permission to ask in her friends. It was very sweet of her, and she did it with much grace. I notice you often have children in. Are you quite sure they are no annoyance?"

"Their father is very indulgent, and thinks children ought to have the best of times while they can. We have often spoken of your little girl. An only child must have many solitary hours. Oh, we shall be glad to have her. They have a playroom and do not disturb the rest of the house, and the refreshments are very simple. And if they have little tiffs, we let them get over them by themselves, unless it is something really wrong. Where there are so many, one cannot be paying attention to every little disagreement."

"You do seem to have a wonderful fashion of getting along with them. I have not had a very wide experience, as there have not been many children in either of our families. Well, I must thank you for offering Gladys that pleasure, and hope they will all have a nice, pleasant time."

"She's much better than I supposed at first," ruminated Mrs. Chedister. "And that Rhoda had a great deal of what the French call *aplomb*, but it is often sheer impudence."

The guests came on the mark, each accompanied

by her best doll and in her white frock. The twins were allowed theirs. Mrs. Mann insisted that Amy should be counted in the party. Marigold had curled the twins' hair and tied one with pink ribbon, the other with blue. Laurel was the prettier, but Rhoda comforted herself with the knowledge that her twin wasn't very smart.

First they had a delightful swing, and took a journey way up to Maine, because Gladys had been to Portland once with her parents. Rhoda aired her learning on every occasion—was she not the hostess? Mamie was almost eight, and she sat in silent wonder that any little girl should know so much.

They had to take their children out, and visit the cunning little guineas and the peacock, who was very sulky and howled. Chan played for them and they sang some pretty songs. Then they were invited out to the grand tea. The older girls had arranged the table and there were flowers and fruit beside the china, plates of dainty sandwiches, cherries with the pits taken out and sugared, raspberries, some thin sliced cold meat, and then Primrose changed the plates, and brought in her mother's pretty decorated bread-plates, cake, and bon-bons. Now and then she smiled over the rather pretentious talk, but it did not seem as if

Amy and Laurel were at their best. Indeed, later on Lal confided to Cap that it was *beautee*-ful, but she thought it was nicer when she and Amy played tea.

"Oh, how many splendid things you have!" said Mamie with a sigh. "My sister is a grown-up young lady and the boys are so rough. Harry went and painted my doll's cheeks blue and Papa punished him. Grace comes in and plays with me, but we have just the corner of the sewing-room and only fancy crackers. Then you have to make believe a good deal. Doesn't Cap scold you? Our Jane is real cross."

"Oh, Cap is ever so funny. Sometimes she clears us out of the kitchen when she's very busy, but she's real good most of the time."

Gladys had been the real guest of honor, partly because she was an only child and could have everything, the others thought; then her frock was very beautiful with its rows of insertion and lace, and she wore a gold chain and pendant and two rings. She had a pair of bracelets, but Mamma said it wasn't good taste to wear them on ordinary occasions. She would hardly have confessed that to Rhoda.

But the greatest fun was after Mr. Mann came

home. Tip hadn't been very social, he wasn't sure he liked a girls' party, but now Goldie and Prim joined and they ventured on some plays that caused a good deal of merriment. The Greers had gone away for a trip, and if they did scream a little, the Firth children thought Mrs. Chedister wouldn't care very much.

"Those children are having a rousing good time," declared Mr. Chedister. "I must say I almost envy Mr. Mann. And he hasn't one own child among them."

"Maybe he wouldn't be so ready to entertain them that way all the time."

"He's mighty fond of them, I notice."

"But it makes children so rough and wild. I didn't think they would have had quite such a time. Gladys isn't used to it. Still I couldn't have refused. And that child did take me by surprise with her airy manners. I think it is time Gladys came home."

"I'll go after her," and he rose.

When he approached the children, they stopped suddenly, and looked rather askance. He laughed.

"Oh, I'm not an ogre to eat you up. I thought I'd come and take Mr. Mann's part. I'm afraid you are imposing upon him."

"Oh, he's just splendid!" and Gladys sidled up to her father. "I never had such a good time. And oh, Papa, come and see the swing," taking his hand.

"My little girl and I have envied you more than once. You are overflowing with fatherhood. And this is the boy who sings? Where is the other?"

"He is spending a fortnight with a friend. And there is one more girl—eight in all, not one too many."

"Well, you are a trump, a philanthropist of the first water! It must cost a mint of money."

"Not as much as some men spend on selfish pleasures. This is mine. And I'll be satisfied to have eight good, useful men and women."

Could he be sure there would not be a black sheep among them? wondered Mr. Chedister.

They crowded into the swing to show him how splendidly it went. Once he was afraid that some of them would tumble out, and they gave laughing squeals.

"I'm of the opinion that we ought to go home, though I'm sorry to break up the party. But it is getting to be a reasonable supper-time."

"We can come again," exclaimed Mamie bravely. "Rhoda said we might."

"You'll have to ask Rhoda's father and mother. And it won't do to come too often."

With that he lifted his little girl out.

It took them some time to say all their good-bys and express their pleasure. Mrs. Mann came to hear these, and looked as sweet and pretty as if there was no hubbub.

Chan took Grace and Mamie home.

"You'd think they'd never had a good time before in all their lives," he said on his return.

"Rhoda's party seems to have been an immense success," said their father.

"But next time I'd like to be consulted about it," remarked their mother.

Mrs. Chedister was sitting on the porch.

"Oh, Gladys! what a frowsy-looking girl. And there—you've torn your frock. I wonder you are not all in rags. You'll be sick to-morrow!"

"Oh, I feel splendid! And we had such a grand time. Mr. Mann was so funny."

"Come and get your hair brushed, and, yes, you must change your dress. I can't have such a wild-looking girl at my dinner table."

Her cheeks were bright, her eyes shining, and the light of happiness had not gone out of her face. Her father stooped and kissed her.

But Laurel had been quite thrown in the shade. She did seem smaller than the others.

"I don't like Rhoda's party *much*," she said with her good-by to Amy. "Ours are nicer. I don't like so many folks. And they think they're so great!"

CHAPTER X

A BOY'S GOOD TIME

LINN was having a very fine time. There were a good many boys about, and they took some nice walks, ran races, and he learned to row a little. But the swimming did not progress very rapidly. He hated to admit it even to himself, but he *was* afraid, and he could have beaten himself with a good will. He was very glad Mr. Bradley said he must not try with any one else. But the bathing and the racing out and getting ducked with a big wave were rare fun.

The racing of the yachts was splendid! They were so beautiful in their snowy whiteness, and flew along in the most fascinating manner. Three were just on the mark. But the real strife was when they came back. And Linn had not heard of the great triumph of the *America* until then.

"Oh, I do hope no one can ever win the cup back! It would be wonderful if they never did," he cried eagerly.

They found a baseball club in which there were

several town boys. The Disbrows were fine players, and they planned a match. After a few days Mr. Bradley went down in the morning with the train, and came home in the steamboat. They took one excursion round the end of the island and saw the great ocean, another one along the shore of their neighboring State.

Catharine proved very efficient in the time she could give them. But they liked the fun of going to the restaurant among the first guests, and having a feast of fish. Some of the people were so queer, quite as odd as those in Denby, and some were very stylish, but most of them seemed to have come for the good time.

Linn wrote a note home every day. When he had Prim's letter with the account of Rhoda's party he read it to Mrs. Bradley, and they laughed over it.

"Rhoda's queer and she isn't afraid of anything. I do think she ought to have been a boy. And she is real smart. We thought our neighbor, Mrs. Chedister, was very tony and uppish, but maybe we didn't know her real well. Queer, isn't it, how men don't seem to mind, but just talk straight ahead to each other, and some women pause to consider whether you are worth speaking to? We felt sorry for the little girl, and Father

said she had the time of her life and they all liked her so. And Mr. Evans was over to dinner Sunday night, and they had such lovely singing."

"They surely will win their way," Mrs. Bradley thought. She had heard of the objections the children had stirred up.

Tip wrote that he didn't see why Linn couldn't swim. Dan had showed him how, and he knew all the strokes and could go over the grass like a fish. If there only were a big pond somewhere! Father had taken them all down to Central Park, and Mr. Collamore had written to say that any time next week they could have their day, and he thought it would be nice to go to the Bronx in a big touring car, so Linn must surely come home.

"Yes, we are going on Monday. I don't believe I should want to spend the whole summer here," Mrs. Bradley said.

"And I'd like to see the folks. Though it has been a splendid outing. Oh, Mrs. Bradley, do you think that May Disbrow is going to get well? Everything tires her out so easily. And the boys tease her and call her 'Granny Grunt'!"

"I feel rather troubled about her, but the mother doesn't seem to worry. And she has faith in the doctor."

May Disbrow was walking down the beach, and

when she spied them out she waved her hand and hurried forward. Mrs. Bradley and Linn were sitting on a rug, she holding a big umbrella that was partly wedged in the sand.

"Oh, how comfortable you look! I was tired of staying alone—all the others have gone out and I hadn't any nice book to read. We sent down a great pack this morning to get changed. I'm tired of staying here, and I don't believe the baths are going to cure me. At first it seemed as if I was getting stronger. Oh, if I only could get well! And I used to be such a hearty girl, until one time I got wet and had an awful cold and a cough. But that's mostly gone. Only you can't have any fun in this miserable sort of way, when you can't do much of anything. You see the girls about tire of you. They're going off with the boys rambling everywhere."

"Sit down here and rest."

"Yes. You look so cozy. Linn, tell me about your sisters, that funny lot."

"Oh, one of the twins gave a party all on her own account, and it was quite jolly. It was last Saturday. One of the big girls wrote to me—Prim, the funny one I told you of."

"Oh, I want to hear. Begin at the very first."

So Linn used Prim's words that Rhoda had

bearded the lion and rescued the little girl who wasn't allowed to have any playmates, and he put in all the bright and amusing bits and the elaborate descriptions that Prim had used. May laughed until a bit of pink came into her cheeks.

"Oh, I wish you could have brought Primrose with you. I like to hear people talk that way. And those twins must be as good as a play. You children must have a very funny streak. And the little boy that cries. And how he was sure he had learned to swim. Have you succeeded yet?"

"Not quite first-class. I think I must be dumb," laughing.

"You learn easier when you are real young and not afraid."

"And I'm so old, is that it?"

"Oh! oh!" and May laughed.

The steamboat just touched the dock.

"Why, it's ever so much gayer down here," cried May. "You don't see much of anything from our cottage—it's turned around, you know. Mother and Auntie thought it was more stylish to be on a real street, Sunset Avenue, and we don't see the sunset either. Oh, there is Mr. Bradley."

He came on waving his hand. Passengers were flocking to the bath-houses. Some were already

in the water. He greeted his wife, then the two young people.

"Where are the boys?" he asked.

"Oh, a lot of them went off in Captain Daly's fishing smack—isn't that what they call it? They're wild about fishing."

"It's been a hot day in the city, and the sail when you get a bit up the East River is delightful. And it is comforting here. Well, Linn, there are only three times more to finish up the fascination of the briny deep. Will the ladies excuse us, or will they share the pleasure?"

"I'm not in the humor," returned Mrs. Bradley. "I'm lazy. But you, May——"

"I'm under a new regimen. I take a warm salt water bath at night—a real bath in a tub. I think I'm rather tired of gyrating round when I can't swim or have a race."

"And the boys will wait to get a boat-load of fish—if they bite."

"I hope that will be their portion. Catharine is here to-night."

"Come, Linn."

They kept their bathing rig in the cottage now. It was more convenient.

"I do wonder if I shall ever learn," the boy was thinking. And it had seemed so easy. He

was really ashamed. There was a little red-haired boy who had been out only a few times with his father, who made a plunge and came up like a goldfish, with the sun shining on him. Linn essayed: he would not drown, of course. Had he been afraid of that?

"Now, my lad," and the boy made a big effort.

"That was well done! Try it over again."

Then a mischief-loving lad gave him a push and Linn struck out, but missed his tormentor, then made several well-executed strokes and turned his head.

"Go on, go on," said Mr. Bradley beside him.

Linn couldn't tell just how the inspiration came to him, but he went off in fine style, laughing, too, and swallowing a mouthful of salt water that he didn't mind a bit.

"Why, it's just as easy."

"We won't get out too far. That's the way it often happens. Now come on again."

He was really fascinated. Why, it seemed as if he could swim on and on. And now he hated to think they were so near the end of their stay. But he began to lag a little.

"Let us go and sit down a few minutes, Linn. That was first-rate."

"I've been awfully stupid, haven't I?"

"Well—you didn't have confidence in yourself. And you wanted to be perfect in a few times of trying. It would have been easier with a few boys on a pond. So many people are confusing."

"I've just envied them all the time. Oh, how good you have been to take so much trouble."

"You'll never forget it all. Now shall we try again? You may never be in danger, but it is one of the best things a boy can know. I was almost afraid your mother would forbid it; women have such curious ideas on the subject. Shall we try again? The tide is running out quite briskly."

Oh, it was exhilarating! Linn's pulses beat with a throb of delight. He wanted to shout with a feeling of triumph. How merry they were all around, laughing, chaffing, daring one another to a race, a dozen holding hands running out eagerly and then back with the next wave. And that wonderful beating of the swells that seemed to start ever so far away! And now the sky was all ablaze with colors one could hardly dream of, changing, melting, flaring up like some magnificent fire at the back.

They walked slowly up the beach, now and then speaking to some companion. May Disbrow still sat there asking questions about the Firths and their wonderful stepfather.

“ I’d just like to see them all together. And suppose that next one should be a great singer? I like Linn because he doesn’t tease or make fun of you, and is so ready to be helpful. Though I guess brothers are better when they are small. And now both of mine will go to business and be young men, and they will want other girls. Then if I shouldn’t get well, how dismal it will be for the little girls. Though they care so much for each other—they may not mind.”

“ Oh, May, don’t get so dispirited. Your mother thinks you have improved wonderfully.”

May gave two or three doubtful nods.

“ I’m sorry you are going away. Almost every one is so full of, well—I suppose it is pleasure. There was a dance to-night. When we first came up here the girls were so jolly and friendly, but I couldn’t run around with them. Maybe it was for the sake of the boys. And now they hardly ever come. But there are so many changes. People come and go—you do not see enough of them to tell whether you like them or not. But we knew a little of you before.”

“ I think you need some cheerful society. I wish you did live farther down. And now the nights will be so beautiful. From ten to four

it has been too hot to go about much. There may be some nice new people coming next week. And didn't the doctor think you were better?"

"I believe Mother felt rather out of conceit with him, but he is coming again next week. I don't seem really ill, only tired and discouraged. Even reading doesn't interest me as it used to. Mother thinks I don't make any effort. But I don't know what to make it about."

Mr. Bradley and Linn were coming up the beach.

"I've got it all right now," declared the boy triumphantly as he ran upstairs to dress.

It was getting toward supper-time, and the boys were to come home with messes of fish. May rose presently and said she must go. Mr. Bradley proposed to walk home with her. After making a little call, he rambled on up the shore. There were rowboats with joyous crews. He didn't see anything of Captain Daly, and presently turned about again, now and then being greeted by some one.

"I'd like to have a cup of tea and some kind of provender," he said to his wife, who was sitting on the porch step.

"Linn has been making the tea. There is some cold beef and cheese and a can of peaches. I think

we shall come short of our feast of fish," and she laughed.

"I hope nothing has happened. But they will not be very far from the shore."

Then they went in. Linn had the table arranged, and welcomed them with an elaborate speech. The tea was splendid, Mrs. Bradley said, and the two others were hungry enough for anything.

Linn insisted on washing up the dishes. Afterward they strolled up the beach again. It was a magnificent night, and it seemed as if almost every one was out, so many were darting about, running to and fro, laughing, bantering, making shrill noises through their hands, and singing a snatch of some old songs.

Then the crowd seemed to disperse somewhat, but the boats were making rhythmic plashes with their oars.

"Let us turn about," said Mrs. Bradley. "It must be a heavy catch of fish."

"I hope it isn't enough to swamp the boat. I think Captain Daly ought to consider those at home, watching."

"You lose some of your consideration at a place like this."

"We do not expect much of the boys."

"Hark!" exclaimed Linn. "That's Dick's whistle." Then he answered it.

"Oh, I supposed they were all right," said the mother.

There were two more signals. Then they saw the boat threading its way in and out among the swimmers. It paused at the little dock before they reached it.

"Sorry you had to wait for your supper," and the hearty voice had a laugh in it. "But we've had luck, sure enough."

"Linn, won't you run up and get a basket or a pan? Mother, I hope you didn't worry."

"I knew it was the last frolic," she replied.

"Fine fishermen, them boys of yours," began the Captain.

"It was because there were so many fish," said Stuart.

"Well, 'twas queer! I thought the fish had been pretty well caught. Now, lads, take your share. You haven't half enough."

"Oh, we don't want so many. We go on Monday," said Mrs. Bradley.

"Well, I'm kinder sorry. Them's nice boys of yours. An' I'm glad they've had a nice time at the last. Now you jest enjoy them fish."

"And we're a thousand times obliged to you

for the cleaning. That's what I positively hate."

The Captain laughed as they exchanged a cordial good-by.

"It was sights of fun," began Dick. "You see, we went up ever so far, and there was a little sort of cove. I think the fish must have gone in there to get out of the way. Then the Captain sold a lot, too, and he has ever so many engaged at the restaurant. My, but I'm hungry as a bear! Have you had supper?"

"Two hours ago."

They reached the house. Linn had been carrying the basket.

"Well, I must have some fish."

"We were cheated out of ours," said his mother, with a half-laugh. "And you'll have to cook them."

"Well, we don't mind. Linn, you'll help?"

"Yes," responded Linn readily.

"And you boys ought to have a taste of camping out. You have had rather civilized meals."

"I don't believe I want seaside next summer," said Stuart. "We've had it now three years. I'd like mountains and wildness—a lake perhaps, and shade and birds singing——"

"And take a cook along," laughed his mother.

They lighted the stove, and took out the big frying pan.

"Can you save some for breakfast?"

"Oh, yes. There are some such big fellows. Now, Linn—you put a lot of fat in the pan—what else have we, Mother?"

"Pepper and salt," she answered gravely, "and the dredging box."

"But we sha'n't 'Hold our pocket handkerchiefs before our streaming eyes,' for we didn't inveigle the fish to walk along with us."

"Didn't we? Well, we took them willy-nilly. Oh, don't they begin to smell fine! Is there plenty of bread? I'm almost hollow."

"I'll make some biscuits for breakfast," promised their mother. "And we are invited out to dinner at the Howes'. Chicken potpie."

"Prim would say that was supersplacious," declared Linn.

"Oh, I wish both girls could have been here and that funny little Tip. How can you tell when the fish are really done? They are nice and brown."

Mrs. Bradley examined them. Linn and Stuart re-set the table, and gathered a few relishes.

"I think they will do now."

"Friends, will you come and share our evening

repast?" and Stuart made a polite bow to his parents, who accepted the invitation with thanks.

How splendid the fish were! And the two boys ate tremendously. Even Linn had a good appetite for his second supper. Then they went out on the front porch. Some of the swimmers were still in evidence, but they were mostly men and now of the rather rough sort, indulging in loud merriment and boisterous songs. Crowds were still walking up and down.

"I'm ready to go home," said Stuart. "I think I like a little more civilization. Though there is a good deal of fun and some nice walks about—and you haven't learned to swim yet, Linn."

"Yes, I guess I've mastered it. But I dare say I'll forget before I meet the next swimming pool."

"There's Willow Lake up above us, only it hasn't much of a beach. You have to make a plunge in most places. There are so many tree roots growing in the water that you get tangled up."

"But it is lovely," said Linn. "We have driven around it several times. And there's Sunfish Pond, though now the creamery people have fenced it in. They say there's a spring at the bottom of it and they are not going to let folks use it any more. It was quite a skating pond,

but the river is good enough for that. But Father is going to get a saddle, and we shall ride Bonnie."

"You're a lucky chap, Linn. Father, please get rich enough to own a horse—well, a buckboard will be good enough. I'd like to ride."

"I think we'd all like a horse and carriage. Well, we'll see."

Yes, Linn had been fortunate. And he was such a nice, generous-hearted chap, so willing, so really fond of doing favors for any one, and so pleasant tempered.

"Father," Stuart began presently, "you won't mind my saying it, I hope, but I don't like the Disbrows as well as I used to. They seemed such nice jolly boys and so full of fun, but I thought before school closed they were not quite—I don't just know what name to give it—upright, I think. And I am glad they are not going to be in the High School."

"I am pleased to have you use a little discrimination in choosing friends. They are bright business boys, and thinking now about making money. I sincerely hope they will keep honest and trustworthy. Neither of them would make a good student, and now your ways will lie apart."

Stuart thought of several little tricks he had

seen really verging on dishonesty, that had shocked him. And Captain Daly had made some remarks about both boys.

"They were very urgent that we should visit them. We can't, and I am glad."

Mr. Bradley was well pleased also.

"I'm sorry for May," declared Dick. "They are not a bit nice to her, and not willing to include her in any pleasure. Oh, I just wish we had a sister, or two or three of them! There were some nice fellows though, and I've had a first-class time, but I don't believe I want to come here again."

"Not even for the fish?"

They all laughed at that.

And the fish were a delight the next morning. It hardly seemed like Sunday. A boat-load of excursionists came up. The Bradleys went to a little chapel about a mile back from the shore. Most of the residents were small farmers, but here and there was a gentleman's estate with barns and stables and lawns.

They had taken eggs and butter from the Howes, who had a well-kept farm, which they made profitable. Oddly enough, these people were, many of them, old Revolutionary stock and held themselves above most of the seashiders.

The chapel service was simple and heartsome, and after it was over they walked the short distance with Mr. Howe and his grown daughter. There was a well-kept, sloping lawn and a house on a little elevation so one could look over to the Sound.

The Howes were very hospitable, and the gentleman was much pleased with the boys, who listened eagerly to some Revolutionary reminiscences. Then his own father had been in the War of 1812, and he himself in the latter part of the Civil War. And he was delighted to find that Linn was a soldier's son. The dinner was appetizing, and they enjoyed the visit very much.

They had quite an evening reception on the porch, with one and another pausing to say good-by. All the Disbrow family came down. May seemed quite bright and cheerful.

Almost before they had packed the next morning, the new tenant, a bustling, important woman, with four children and a stack of belongings, came upon them. They had not much baggage,—a few boxes and trunks, that were to go on the return trip of the boat.

It seemed odd to be in busy, bustling New York. Linn went to his father's factory and was warmly

welcomed. Everybody was well, but they had missed him a great deal. Mrs. Bradley had some shopping to do, and they all had luncheon together. Then Mr. Mann took the party home, as Mr. Bradley had gone to business.

"It's been just fine," said Linn, "but I'm glad to go home. And I'm so much obliged to you for the outing," and he gave the lady's hand a squeeze. "I'll have to tell it all over to the children, so I'll have the good of it twice."

"And we're coming over in a day or two. We want to see Chan and the girls and those entertaining twins," said the Bradley boys.

They all exclaimed at Linn. He was dreadfully sunburned, and he had grown fatter, and did he really know how to swim?

"Why, it's just as easy!" cried Tip. "Dan showed me how. It's this way," and down went Tip on the short grass with arms and legs flying, to the great detriment of his blouse.

"But what I'd like to have seen," said Chan, "was that yacht race. I looked up all about the *America*, and Father's going to take us down sometime to the Yacht Club and we can see the cup. Wasn't it just splendid! And I do hope the English will never be able to win it from us.

"And you've been to Connecticut and Long

Island, and seen the real ocean, and is it ever so big?"

"Pretty big. You can't see across it."

"And you didn't get drowned," said Laurel.

"You look so—so queer."

"I didn't even get a look at a whale."

"Nor Jonah?" commented Tip.

"Jonah died a good long while ago," appended Rhoda.

"Oh, Mother," Linn said, when he could get away from the children, "I'm so glad to get back to you. You're the sweetest mother! And nice as they all were, I *was* just a little bit homesick at first. It was so queer there at the beach. Why, the cottages are no better than our little old house, and there are so many of them. You can't live in them in the winter; there is no way of warming them. And oh, the sand! I don't think anybody wept about it, though," laughing. "And the bathers looked so funny ducking around. We wished for Prim and Goldie and little Lal—oh, all of you."

"Where would you have put us?" asked his mother, and then they both laughed.

After Cap took her clothes down and folded them, she sat on the step and wanted to hear all about it. She had never been more than ten miles

from Denby, and that people could run about in the water and swim and not get drowned, seemed a miracle. And catching fish continually! "Why they'll soon get them drained out," she said.

"More come all the time."

It seemed queer not to see Mrs. Alden. The poor little baby had died, and the mother was far from strong.

Then Mr. Evans dropped in to dinner, and one would think Linn had come from Europe at least. And the peacock was sold and his new owner thought him very handsome. And they had ten new little guineas, and had sold eight of the older ones.

Mr. Evans was delighted with all the happenings, and said that Linn looked fine.

"I don't like him so red," said Goldie.

Amaryllis said they had been to see Granny Keen, who was all crippled up with the rheumatism, and the Burnhams had moved. Katy had been over and stayed three days, and was really well. Dan drove them over to the Denby picnic, and the people were so funny and what Cap called "backwoodsy." And Mr. Beers wanted to know if Linn wasn't most ready to come back to the store. "As if you ever meant to!" exclaimed Prim indignantly.

Linn really felt very tired; he had talked so much, and listened so hard when there were several voices exploiting different subjects.

"Were you afraid to sleep alone?" he asked with his arm around his little brother.

"Well—I didn't—'cause Chan said I might have a nice bed in his room on the floor. I wasn't afraid, quite, for Cap was up there. But I thought Chan would like to have me. It was awful lonesome without you. I wish I'd been there to swim. I know I could do it."

Linn gave a soft little laugh, and hugged him. How dear they all were!

CHAPTER XI

A DAY OF DAYS

DAN had been down for letters. There was one from Mr. Collamore. He was to be in New York all the week. He had decided upon Bronx Park because they could have a nice automobile ride. They would go in the big touring-car, and he could take them all in. Neither Father nor Mother must feel at all worried, he should be just as careful as if they were all his own.

"But *do* you think it truly safe?"

Mrs. Mann glanced up with an anxious face. She had not opened her letter yet.

"I think I'd trust Mr. Collamore. He has never entered for a race yet."

"What would that have to do with it?"

"Well, he would not be so reckless."

"Will the auto thing run away?" asked Tip.

"Oh, I think not, with all you children in it. You'd make pretty good ballast."

"Mother, what is in your letter?" and Goldie looked up anxiously. "Maybe he's invited you separately."

"Oh, I wouldn't go for anything! Bonnie is good enough for me."

The terror in her face was ludicrous.

"The letter—oh, yes. Why, it's from Oaklands. The manse. What a pretty name for a parsonage! And—why, Father, she's invited us for over Sunday and as long as we can stay. But—I couldn't go."

"And why not?" inquired Mr. Mann.

"And leave all the children?"

"Cap will be the great high chief commander. Amaryllis will take office as the Grand Begum, who can always imprison unruly subjects, and perhaps treat them to something wonderful when they have been very good, as children generally are," and there was a sly twinkle in his eye. "Linn will be the great high executioner, to see that all commands are obeyed. Dan—well, he and the dogs will see that no thieves break in at night and steal the silver and kidnap—well, Laurel. I could not spare Laurel."

"I don't want to be—to be kapped. I'd run away and hide."

"We'd set the dogs on them."

"Oh, I know," cried Prim. "Cap would pour boiling water on them."

"Capital," returned Mr. Mann. "Now we must

learn whether these appointees will accept the offices thus thrust upon them without a moment's warning."

"I will," exclaimed Linn heartily.

"And I," said Amaryllis. "Oh, Mother, *do* go."

"We'll call in Cap," said their father.

Cap came in wondering. Mr. Mann laid the matter before her in a very serious manner, while Mrs. Mann tried to interrupt, but was laughingly talked down.

"Why did you think I couldn't look after them all a few days?" and Cap looked almost indignant. "Sunday there'd be nothing to do——"

"Couldn't we have anything to eat?" cried Prim.

"You hold on an' see. I haven't starved you yet. An' I don't need to go home, you know. They save up a lot of things for me to do, an' it'll be funny for them to get mistook. I'd just like to hear Pop scold. An', Mis' Mann, I just want you to go an' have a first-rate time. You haven't been anywheres in ever so long."

There was a great chorus in a variety of keys.

"But Mrs. Alden was here then——"

"Well, I'm sure I could run a boarding-house and grown-ups are mighty queer with all their

quips and quirks, while children can just play an' eat an' sleep. Oh, we'll get along. You needn't worry a mite."

"Thank you, Cappadocia. And we'll settle the other matter—Mr. Collamore proposes Thursday. Will that suit the August Assembly?"

They all decided it would. Mr. Mann would telephone as soon as he went to the factory.

"There'll be six of us," began Marigold.

"Why, there's eight," returned Rhoda. "Oh, Father, I want to go. I've never been in an auto."

"See here," said Mrs. Mann, anxious to avert a storm and quite losing sight of the fact that it committed her to the visit, "Mrs. Burnham has invited you both. She says, 'Katy will be disappointed if you do not bring the twins. She wants to see them so.'"

Rhoda ran around to her mother's side. Mr. Mann rose and began to kiss those nearest him. He said it was lucky kisses didn't cost anything or he would be bankrupted.

"Oh, you know——" as he reached Mrs. Mann.

"Haven't a moment, dear," and he was off.

Mr. Collamore's invitation took the precedence. They wondered what Bronx Park would be like,

and if it was as much fun as Coney Island. But there would be the splendid ride.

Cap had gone back to her ironing. "Come, girls," said their mother, "let us get the dishes out of the way. Children, you run out of doors."

"Children" meant Tip and the twins. Tip captured Linn and wanted to know about the ocean and the boats, and what a yacht was like—if it was a steamboat with an engine. Rhoda came to listen. Laurel took her doll out for her health, and told it they wouldn't go to seaside 'cause it made you all red and your hands black, and there were great big fishes that could eat you up, and there was sand all over and no pears or apples, and they'd rather go and see Katy.

Chan went to his practice. Marigold dusted, and then they went upstairs. When the table was set for luncheon Rilla went to the kitchen and made a simple dessert for that night's dinner.

"You'll go?" she said to her mother.

"Oh, I can't," was the reply.

But Cap said, "Now you just hold on, Miss Rilla. I'll plan it all out. You and I can keep house just as snug as a couple of mice in a big cheese. Your father doesn't bluster round and make a fuss, but I notice he has his way in the end. And your mother's airned a right to a trip

off somewhere, an' the minister's wife feels she can't do enough for her. Well, so sh'd I, if my little girl had been made so round an' rosy, when she was such a meachin' little thing. An' we won't be worked to death, nuther."

After luncheon Amaryllis packed a basket of goodies for Granny Keen.

"See here," said Linn, "would you mind if I went along, and then we stopped a little while at the Bradleys'?"

"Why, no, I'd like it."

They found Granny Keen poorly enough, just able to hobble about a little with a cane. She was sitting out on the porch in a big chair, with cushions all around her and a faded old shawl over her knees. She was all alone. Dave's wife had taken her sewing and gone to a neighbor's.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to see a livin' bein' once again before I die," began Granny in a quavering voice. "I set here alone from mornin' to night an' not a soul to care whether I live er die. An' my hip an' leg is that gin out I kin hardly bear a bit o' weight on 'em. Some day I 'xpect I'll be clear helpless, an' then I'll be hustled off to the poor-house. I was a good mother to Dave, too, an' his father meant that he should be good to me. He'd do well enough, but I know *she's*

hopin' every day that I'll drop out. An' now we've no parson an' I'll have to die like a heathen."

Granny began to cry.

"Oh, can't I do something for you?" interposed Amaryllis. "I've brought you a nice bowl of rice pudding, and Mother sent some tea——"

"Oh, make me a cup, quick. There's some dry stuff in the kitchen. I'm so cold most of the time. A good hot drink is so comfortin'."

Rilla unpacked her basket on the table. There was part of a loaf of bread, fruit, a dozen eggs, and some stewed chicken. She built a fire and soon had the kettle singing.

The tea was fragrant and good. She helped the poor old body indoors and to the table.

"My, but I'm feasted like a queen! Rilla, your mother alwers was good to everybody. She seemed to have something, and she was poor, too, and how nice you alwers lived in that little old house! An' now tell me 'bout the Burnhams. They have a fine place, Dave said, and that's more than can be said for Denby. And some fine folks took Linn off summering, I heard. Well, you do have luck."

Linn had proposed to drive on a bit, as he was not at all fond of Granny Keen. Rilla tidied up the room, and arranged the closet, talking all

the time in a pleasant fashion. Then she heard Linn drive round, and said she must go.

“Well, you’ve done me a sight of good. Tell your mother I’m glad the Lord sent her prosperity and a good husband. I hope he is good to you children, too. And oh, do come over again soon. You always were a nice girl, Rilla, and I hope when it comes your turn you’ll get a good husband. Now mind, and come soon again. I can’t half tell you how obleeged I am. An’ I haven’t tasted chicken for weeks.”

“Good-by, and I hope you will get better.”

“I’d like to get well enough to come over an’ make you a visit when there wa’n’t any other company. I’m such a poor creetur now.”

Amaryllis didn’t feel quite like echoing the wish, and yet she was sorry for poor Granny.

“Well,” asked Linn—“was there a bushel of complaints?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry for her. I mean to go over oftener,” in her sympathetic tone.

“And did she give you a volume of good advice about not being ‘sot up’ with your good fortune?”

“No, she never said a word,” laughed the girl.

Mrs. Bradley was glad to see them. The cook had come back on Saturday, and so there was a

welcoming voice and a good supper for them when she reached home. Mrs. Bradley said she was very glad to get back home. The boys were out clearing up the garden, but they recognized Bonnie and hastened in.

"It seemed fine to wake up in a civilized bed, didn't it?" laughed Stuart. "And aren't we black? I've been taking sweat baths to improve myself. But doesn't it make your eyes look curiously dark? We *did* have a good time though. Miss Rilla, did Linn complain because we put too much on him? He was our delightful Miss Betty."

"Why, he thought it was very fine. And Tip is quite sure he has learned to swim on the grass."

"He has the theory all right," returned Linn. "But the experience in the water may be different. You can't think how nice it was to see them all. Though I wasn't at all homesick, and it was glorious to see the ocean and the great crowds of people."

"But your own home is more comfortable."

Linn smiled and nodded.

"Come out and see how industrious we have been. The garden was a terror. Why *do* weeds grow so fast when they are good for nothing!"

They had made a great improvement.

"But I think now we will retire from our agricultural labors. Dick, suppose you order up our pony turnout?"

"Oh, see here," began Linn. "Can't you come over, and when I've taken Rilla home we'll go out for a bit. And the girls will be glad to see you."

"Why—yes. That's very nice of you, Linn. We will go and slick up. To-morrow we'll finish the garden."

Amaryllis was having a nice call with Mrs. Bradley, and inwardly recalling her anxiety the first time they had all come to tea. And Mrs. Bradley was detailing how much they had enjoyed Linn. "For, you see, it was not like a regular seaside place with hotels and society."

Then Linn came in, and they took their departure, driving over homeward. The boys soon arrived. Dan suggested he had better put in Lady Betty, as she needed an airing. The girls were on the porch, and announced their excursion on Thursday.

"Well, you *are* in luck. What a jolly time you will have. I'd like to have an invisible cap or ring and follow in the wake. I'd want wings though, wouldn't I?"

"But you have been having lots of fun."

"So has Linn. He ought to stay home and

keep us company. We have a good half of our garden to weed yet. You should see the sight it was!"

"Gardens, like liberty, demand eternal vigilance," announced Prim sententiously.

Lady Betty came round tossing her head and surveying the group, and the boys sprang into the carriage waving their hands.

Amaryllis went upstairs where her mother sat sewing, and rehearsed her visit to Granny Keen.

"She looks very poorly, and she ate as if she was half-starved. Oh, do you suppose Dave's wife takes any care of her? It's very hard for her to walk. She has to take hold of things with the one hand."

"No, I do not believe she has the kind of attention she needs, poor old body. But I do think every one ought to make some friends for old age, instead of bristling up disagreeably. But it is hard when you are alone in the world."

Amaryllis sat by the open window and thought. When people were ill and perhaps near the end, the minister always went to see them and talked about the life to come. There was no minister at Denby now. Oh, must any one die without consolation? Oh, wasn't it a good thing to think of this all through life, for every one had to die. It

did not seem dreadful when Mr. Evans described the other country and the communion of saints, that meant all the blessed people who had loved God and done what good they could and made some one happy. And she hoped in her simple girl's heart that she might be able to do this, for *they* were so happy.

"To do good and distribute——" that was in the offertory verses. She could almost hear Mr. Evans's voice in it.

Then there was another very human voice, and she and her mother went downstairs. Prim and Marigold held Mr. Mann prisoner.

Yes, he had telephoned, and Mr. Collamore had been in, very glad it suited them to go on Thursday, as it would be quite a leisure day. And their father was not to consider it a trouble at all, for he was to enjoy it as a big picnic, and see what having such a family was like.

"And now you must put on your nicest manners, only don't be too fine."

They were all beside themselves with delight. But Amaryllis followed her father into the hall and clasped his arm.

"Do you think Mother *will* go to Oaklands?" she questioned eagerly.

"Oh, yes. I'll see that she does."

"Oh, you dear father, how good you are to us all!"

He bent over and kissed her.

After the work was done, and somehow it did not seem very arduous, she and Chan practiced their music. Amy came up to play with the twins. The swing was a never-failing source of pleasure. Gladys and her mother had gone for a visit and now several of the school-girls were away. Oh, there was Eunice Williams. Amaryllis had called on her once with Bonnie. Eunice sat at the sewing machine.

"It's very good of you to come," said Mrs. Williams, "but Eunice can't spare the time. The man comes for the work to-morrow, and in some way we've fallen behind. They're put out if you leave anything over. And they're driving everybody just now, and it makes good money."

"But you'll come again, won't you?" pleaded Eunice.

"Wednesday is about the best day," said her mother. "You see, the work slacks up presently, and you have to make hay while the sun shines."

Eunice gave her an imploring look, and she answered with a smile.

It was Wednesday now, so she might try it again. Eunice had just finished sweeping the

sitting-room. She looked very pale and tired.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come. We've been sort of cleaning house, and I have only to dust now. I did my part of the ironing last evening. Can you wait? I won't be long."

"Oh, yes," answered Amaryllis in a sweet tone.

"Come in the parlor and wait."

Eunice went out to the kitchen, and there was some rather sharp talk. Then she heard her bustling about, and all was quiet until she came downstairs in her pretty gingham.

Her mother entered the room.

"Now, Rilla, don't you keep Eunice out more than an hour or two. We're busy folks, and can't afford a servant to do our work, and there's only one girl to help, while your mother has a troop. But I don't suppose she lets any of you do the real work. Did she send away that other woman, who kept house before your mother came?"

"Oh, no. We were sorry to have her go. Her son's wife was ill, and her baby has died."

"Well, I should think one help was enough, unless she means to bring up all you girls in idleness. It's a poor way, to my thinking. If your stepfather should die you'd be a helpless lot cast on the world. And your mother's worked hard enough in her day."

"Oh, we are all learning to keep house and sew," returned Amaryllis pleasantly, as she rose.

"Now, Eunice, don't stay out until tea-time. I'll be tired enough ironing all the afternoon."

Rilla helped her into the surrey. She dropped down with a gasping breath, and turned very pale.

"I hurried so," she began. "And, Rilla, don't mind Mother. It's her way. She talks sharp to Father and the boys. I've come to have a queer pain in my side that catches me when I breathe. It tires me sewing on the machine, but I can do so much nicer work than Mother. I don't think we needed to take in shop work, but most of the women are doing it. But we do have to hurry so."

"Now you must enjoy everything. It's such a lovely day. Where will we go?"

"Oh, up the lane. Everybody says your old house is kept so nice. Mother won't hear to having a flower bed. We have some roses and hollyhocks, but I do love flowers that bloom so much. And then I'd like to go to Grafton—to your new home—if you didn't mind."

There was such a wistful sound in her voice.

"I thought I would take you there. We have such hosts of flowers. And you'd hardly know the twins, they have grown so, at least Rhoda has. Laurel is almost a baby yet, and has some crooked

words. And you'd laugh over the stories she tells her dolls, though she likes the rag baby the best. I do believe she is a little afraid of the new one. And they have come to know the next-door little girl quite well, and one a few doors down the street."

"Oh, I wish I had some sisters. Boys are no company, at least, our three are not. Joe has a place in the mill now, and he thinks he's grown up and can do as he likes. He gives Mother only part of his money, but he's saving it up—what for, she can't make him tell. Oh, here is the old house. Isn't it just beautiful! I'd like to live in it myself."

The big old tree had been trimmed up a little, and under each window was a flower bed. Then on the fence along the road, vines had been planted and trained and looked really beautiful.

Greta came out. "Oh, Miss Rilla, won't you stop? Mother'll be ready in a minute, and she wants you to come in. And I've made two such lovely collars from the patterns in those magazines you sent me! Oh, *do* 'light and come in!"

"Yes. You'll like to see the place, Eunice. It has been made so pretty. You see, Mother didn't have time, and there were so many children to patch and darn and knit for."

The keeping-room was a pretty parlor. Mr. Bachman had bought an old bookcase and transformed it into a sideboard. There were some "best dishes" on the shelves, and some keepsakes that had come from the old German home. There were flowers in bowls, fancy bottles that had been decorated with bits of colored paper, and pretty cushions on the chairs; it all had a most inviting aspect.

"This is my friend, Miss Eunice Williams," said Amaryllis. "And this is Greta Bachman."

"Oh, your friend was in the school—but among the big girls. I'm very glad to see her, and made most happy with your coming. And here is my mother."

Mrs. Bachman was most cordial. How were all the children and the twins and the pretty mother, who was like a girl herself? And they were so happy here, and the man was doing so many things. Oh, they gave thanks every day that the Good Father had sent Mrs. Mann such a nice husband, so they could have the house! They were homesick no longer for the fatherland. And the ladies must come and see the garden and such beautiful chickens!

It took Amaryllis back to the days of *her* father and her little-girlhood, when everything

was in bloom. Why, there couldn't be another garden like it in all Denby! And the vegetable beds were a sight, and there was a yard of little chickens by themselves with a mother hen tied close by the coop, and another run with half-grown ones, bright-eyed and with clean yellow legs.

"And we have the cow now, though she isn't all paid up. And I make such nice butter. I can sell what we don't want. And eggs, when we have them. And in the fall, chickens. Oh, it is so nice living here. Husband will be sorry to miss you. He has gone to your good neighbor's to cut some wood for him, and he is to have some. He takes this day off to do other things. Work is very good, and we must lay up a little, for bad times may come. But what matter if we keep happy?"

She was so rosy, so smiling and cheerful. Eunice almost envied her for a mother.

Then they must see Greta's laces and collars. One day a lady in a carriage had stopped and bought some laces. The collar wasn't quite finished, but she had engaged it and one beside. "And I like to do the work so, and change the stitches about and make up new fancies." Greta's face was one bright smile. It even filled her eyes.

"I am going to take my friend over to Graf-

ton," Rilla began presently. "And so we must bid you good-by."

"But you must come again. And you must have a little of my raspberry cordial. It is so reviving."

It was, truly. They would have enjoyed staying the whole afternoon, but that was not possible.

"Oh, how happy they are!" and Eunice's voice was full of emotion. "And what a lovely mother! I've heard that German women were hard to their children."

"Mrs. Bachman is not. She's just as fond of Fritz, and he loves her just as dearly. Now, Bonnie, you must trot along."

Eunice was very quiet, wondering what made mothers so different. And what a happy life the little girl must have!

Then they came to Grafton, where all things had a lovely, refined air. No falling fences, no unkempt dooryards, no thriftless, shabby-looking houses. Oh, if one could live here!

"How beautiful! Oh, Amaryllis, how rich your father must be!"

"No, he is not so very rich, but he wants us all to have a lovely time while we are together. He is so good and kind."

Eunice thought she had never seen so handsome

a house and grounds. And oh, how jolly the children were! Mrs. Mann greeted her so cordially, and there was Chan, whose misfortune had touched their hearts, and Linn, getting to be quite a tall boy. She had almost forgotten the younger ones. And if it had been lovely at the Bachmans', here it was simply entrancing. And the books!

"I wish I could find time to read," she exclaimed laughingly. "But there is so much mending to do in the evenings. And I get so tired and sleepy. Oh, I'd come here and do housework if I had no home, just for the sake of being with you. I almost hate to go home. Oh, that's wicked, isn't it?"

Rilla had no heart to contradict her.

"You must come as often as you can. I wish you could spend a whole day. If you sent a little note, I'd come over any time, or Dan goes about so much he could stop. If you only could let me know."

Eunice swallowed over a great lump in her throat, and could not trust her voice.

Then she must hear Chan play, and that seemed like one's thought of heaven. Goldie and Prim hovered about her, and Chan was so sweet.

She looked up at the clock. It was half-past five.

"Oh," she cried, "I must go this very minute."

I've never had quite such a happy time, and I'm afraid I never will again."

"Oh, you must come and spend that day, for we haven't talked about any of the things I meant to. And, Eunice, here are two pretty books about girls. I've written your name in them and they are for keeps. I know you'll like them so. And Dan shall drive you home; you'll soon be there——"

"Oh, good-by, dear Amaryllis," and the tears overflowed the girl's eyes. "Thank you a thousand times."

Dan lifted her in, surprised to find her so light. She was growing thinner every day.

Two of the neighbors were saying good-by to her mother on the porch. She was very glad they had seen her return, and that they would bruit abroad that she had been visiting over at Grafton at Bessy Firth's, who had married that man in such a queer fashion, but it *had* turned out well.

Eunice ran upstairs, changed her frock, and slipped the books in the corner of the old bureau; and was down again just as her mother entered the kitchen.

"Well, you *did* stay!" Mrs. Williams began rather tartly. "Now you fly round! Father'll be in, and you know he can't bear to wait for his supper."

CHAPTER XII

PLAYING AT QUALITY

PRIMROSE thought there never had been two such long days, and she was sure it would rain on Thursday, but it didn't, and the air was a little cooler. They were to meet Mr. Collamore at the Grand Central, and as Mr. Mann and the children came through the waiting-room, their host stepped forward with a cordial greeting.

"We're very glad to come," exclaimed Chan. "And we hope we won't tire you out with so many of us."

"Not much, my lad. Shall I count?" laughing. "It's my party. Now I'll bring them down to the factory at five o'clock or along there. Thank you for trusting them to me," was the earnest response.

There was the great touring-car, and Mr. Collamore had driven it half over Europe. He took the chauffeur along in case he should be needed for an emergency.

"Oh! oh! oh!" were the surprised exclamations.

"Well, there's a sight worth seeing," declared a bystander. "Don't say they all belong to one family?"

"Yes," returned Mr. Collamore proudly.

"Well, you're a lucky man."

"Oh," said Prim, laughing, "he thought we were all your children."

"Would you be sorry?" He was helping them in.

"Oh, I don't think I *could* give up Father Mann. He's been so good to us all. And he loves Mother so much."

"He would still have her."

"But it wouldn't be—oh, he loves us and the twins. And you might think us a trouble. We have little spats sometimes. But Mother settles them mostly. Oh, you are very nice!"

They were packed in. Linn sat with the chauffeur, as Mr. Collamore wanted Chan and Primrose. Then they started slowly, threading their way through the press of vehicles, and presently finding a clearer road.

The children looked at each other in wonderment. They were gliding along so curiously—faster, faster, until it seemed as if they flew. The road was quite clear.

"How do you like it?" in a gay tone.

"It almost frightens me," said Amaryllis, and she was rather pale.

"Could you stop it like a horse?" asked Mari-gold.

"Jules, hold up a minute," said Mr. Collamore.

And there the auto stopped in the road, and the children looked at each other in consternation.

"Is anything the matter?" cried Linn.

"We were just showing how she could stop."

"Do they ever run away?" asked Tip.

"I think they have sometimes, when the master was dozing."

"Then you must not doze," suggested Prim in an authoritative tone.

They went on at a moderate pace.

"I don't like to fly so," said Tip. "The trees get all in a tangle, and the houses run away, and everything is topsy-turvy. You can't tell what it is like, nor where you are going."

Mr. Collamore laughed. "That is about it. We are going to take a nice drive first, and then we will turn into the Park and ramble around, look at the animals and the birds."

"I want to find a beaver and see his house," returned Tip.

"I don't believe he will invite you in, he is not

a very social fellow. And it is mostly underground."

They were going through a beautiful section now,—large estates with woodlands and long sweeps of velvet turf and houses like miniature palaces. Such a profusion of beautiful flowers in masses or trees covered with strange drooping vines! Autos passed them with ladies and one or two children, who looked curiously at the six eager faces.

After a while they turned about, and seemed coming back. Then the spaces of wood were smaller, there were some orderly shrubbery, little streams meandering about, and an enclosure with a sort of rocky basin, where something lay stretched out.

"Oh, what is it?" demanded Tip.

"The two polar bears."

"But they are not much white," said Goldie.

"No, they are whitest in midwinter; now their fur has a yellow tinge," answered Mr. Collamore.

"But they must be awful hot. See how they pant! Oh, I wish they were way up in the Polar Sea. It seems cruel to make them suffer so," and Prim really sighed.

"I think so myself. Now around here are some funny little black bears that will amuse you."

They stepped out of the auto, and stretched their limbs, following Mr. Collamore around. There were two large concrete basins. In each inclosure were two black bears, one pair very small, but, oh, how merry they were! They were certainly in's and out's. The one who was in the pond ran around trying to climb up, but his companion would loosen his paws and push him back. Then one would grab the other, and they would both splash down into the pond. Then there was a great struggle to get out. They seemed fairly to laugh when one or the other was defeated. The children laughed as well. Suddenly one little chap vaulted on the back of the other, and out he sprang. Prim gave a shout and the others joined.

"Do you suppose they do that all day long?" asked Goldie.

"That is their exercise and amusement. They eat, and take some naps when they are tired."

"There they go at it again. Well, they are funny!"

"Now let us look at these. That's a gruff old fellow."

Sure enough. He growled and struck out with his paw. The mate was full of mischief and quick as a flash. He was trying to push the larger one into the pond.

"I don't believe he can do it," said Linn.

They watched eagerly, and were just turning away when there was a splash, and a shower all around, and a growl that was tremendous as the bear rose and shook himself. Then there was a mad chase round and round.

"Oh, will they kill each other?" cried Amaryllis in alarm.

"I think not. The keepers wouldn't allow them to stay together if there was any real danger."

"Oh, let's go on," besought Goldie. "I can't bear fighting."

"I'll stay and watch them and keep you in sight. Don't go off this curved path," said Linn.

"The tigers and leopards are just around here."

The tigers were lazy and sleepy, and looked out of half-closed yellow eyes, but the leopard had two little cubs. How soft and shiny their skins were! They played and gamboled about, but the mother seemed keeping sharp watch out of her suspicious eyes.

Linn rejoined them. "Well, the smaller one beat, and now they are lying cuddled up together, as if they had never been mad at each other," he said.

"Perhaps they were not really mad. Men box and fence without being angry."

"I don't like these fierce-looking animals very much," declared Chan. "They always seem so treacherous."

"Oh, here are the monkeys!" sang out Prim.

There were several compartments and different species, some very odd and human-looking, some really pretty, if monkeys could be called that. They were running, leaping, chattering, and positively laughing, it seemed, holding out their paws in a most beseeching manner, ready to snatch at any luxury. There was a crowd of children running to and fro and shouting with laughter at the antics, and making all sorts of ridiculous comments that were more amusing to the grown spectators than the monkeys.

"I've had enough of them," announced Chan. "Do you know where the birds are?"

"We'll ask."

The birds were at quite a distance. Tip wanted to stay. The monkeys were next to a goat.

"I can't have any of you lost," said Mr. Collamore. "Perhaps we may come back this way."

The gentleman took his hand, but the little boy lagged. Then suddenly Mr. Collamore turned his head partly round.

"See there by that big tree and the little brook. There are two beavers."

They seemed very busy, and really had no time for visitors, but worked straight ahead, disappearing in a little hollow and coming up in a different place, their coats shining with drops of water. Suddenly they seemed to suspect that they were watched, and disappeared as if by magic.

"Oh, what makes them so afraid? Can't we see their houses?"

"No, you couldn't get at them without destroying them."

"But won't they come out again?"

"Not while we are here. Now let us take a look at the birds."

Just before they reached them they came in sight of the auto, and Mr. Collamore exchanged a few words with the chauffeur, nodding to a shady spot over beyond.

"Oh, this is the most splendid of all!" exclaimed Chan. "And hear the singing. Why, how do they keep them from flying away?"

"If you look sharp up high, you will see wire-netting about. There are birds from almost every country, many very rare. I think it is really the gem of the place. Some have been quite acclimated and live in the open. I have been in places where the forests are quite as full as this, and people consider it a sin to kill a bird."

"I have a book of our own birds," said Chan, "and we occasionally find them around. There is no hunting at Grafton. But this is wonderful, like a grand concert. And those pheasants are splendid. Oh, how many beautiful things there are in the world!"

"Do you suppose the bird on that high pedestal ever comes down and walks around?" asked Linn. "If so he must need a page to carry those long tail-feathers. He never can drag them over the stones and rubbish. How serene he looks! You don't suppose he is stuffed, do you?"

Mr. Collamore laughed.

"Now we must look him up," declared Goldie. "And see those snowy cockatoos with their golden crowns! Why, you could watch them for a whole day and then you wouldn't have seen them all."

"I think you must be tired and hungry. I have some refreshments in a hamper. Suppose we go to that shady nook yonder and refresh ourselves."

"I was beginning to wish—why, *we* ought to have brought some lunch——"

"No, you were my guests for the day. And when we are through sight-seeing, we will have a real dinner."

They wandered over to the little nook that was

about half surrounded by shrubbery. They could still hear the birds singing. The auto came up.

"There is a pretty wayside house not far below with a table and seats," announced Jules.

"Oh, let us stay here and sit on the grass," cried Primrose. "It will be a real picnic. And that big oak makes such a lovely shade and shuts us in. We haven't been anywheres on a picnic."

"Perhaps Mr. Collamore won't enjoy sitting on the ground," suggested Amaryllis hesitatingly.

"Yes, I can even do that. Jules, bring out the hamper."

On top of it was a white cloth. The girls spread it out. Then there was a pile of paper plates and napkins.

"You see, I know how to prepare for a picnic," and Mr. Collamore smiled. "Now we must all sit round and not make too large a circle. What are you laughing about, Miss Primrose?"

"Oh, one time last summer it was, and we didn't know Mr. Mann very well, but he offered to take us to ride, and he had a great basket of goodies. There's a queer, pretty place with a waterfall and wild grapes, and a big flat stone for a table. Linn and Rilla didn't go—why, that was the day the fortune came"—and she glanced around hesitatingly as if she was half afraid to go on.

"Well—and you had a fortune! I must hear about it."

"It wasn't much." Prim's face grew very red. "Oh, Mr. Collamore, we were poor then, we had the little old house and Mother's pension, but somehow we didn't mind very much, and an old lady died, and Mother had to go to the funeral, and then she had to stay on account of something in a will——"

"And I said 'Let's cry,' and we all cried. And Father stopped to see—he was just Mr. Mann then, and—and," Tip hesitated.

"He stopped and asked what we were crying about," and Prim took up the story. "It must have looked very funny. We'd been playing round in the dirt," and her face turned very red.

"And he brought the fortune?"

"Oh, it wasn't quite that way. There was a very old lady who'd saved up 'most everything, and she'd made a will as to how they were to be divided. Mother had to stay to hear. And we said—'Our mother's gone away and left us all alone.' And he thought it was so funny, when there were so many of us. The next day he went down to the station, and brought Mother home. And he promised to take us all out riding some

time. And then an old bundle came—clothes and things——” Goldie paused.

“ Oh, Mr. Collamore, you can’t care about this,” said Amaryllis, flushing.

“ Yes, yes. And when Mr. Mann came back——”

“ But it was wonderful to have anything left to us, you see,” said Linn, with a touch of courage in his voice. “ It was the beginning of great things for us. And then there came five dollars. But we waited and waited for Mr. Mann. But he did come after a while. Mother and I and Rilla went down to the store. Chan, you go on.”

“ He took the rest of us to ride and took along a lot of goodies. We found a pretty place and had a royal time. And he talked about my hip, and sent me to that lovely hospital, and there I met Arthur. Oh, I wish he could have been made over! And he promised to come to us in the summer, and wasn’t at all afraid of the little house. We should all have loved him so. And then came all those beautiful books—that was the next fortune.”

Chan winked very hard, and there was a tremble in his voice.

“ And the picnic was something like this,” appended Primrose.

Mr. Collamore squeezed Chan's small hand in remembrance. Jules had been setting out dishes of chicken, sandwiches, cake, fruit and nuts, and some lovely bonbons.

"Now, afterward, I want you to sing for me the thing that was such a comfort to Arthur. But you must empty the piles first. And I'm very glad to have you here and give you the second picnic. I don't want to lose sight of you in the years to come, though I can't be quite such a friend to you as Mr. Mann."

"He's just the loveliest father," declared Goldie. "And you are splendid, too. And there's Mr. Gwynne——"

"The musical director? You don't mean him?"

"Yes. Oh, Chan, tell how it has been set to music and two young men play it on the cornet."

"Yes. I've heard. It is considered quite wonderful."

They ate and talked and laughed, and threw some crumbs and nuts to the squirrels, and then Chan said:

"It isn't a real song, you know. Goldie and I used to do those things as near to the birds as we could get them, and I didn't suppose they would ever interest any one much. Come, Goldie."

Mr. Collamore closed his eyes. Yes, it was truly birds. No wonder it charmed his poor little boy's headaches!

"Chan," he said, much moved. "Child, you have a marvelous voice. What does Mr. Gwynne say about it?"

"Oh, he's going to look after it. But I couldn't leave Mother, and Father, who has been so good to me, and I am only a little fellow yet. But I love to sing, and music stirs me all up. We are going to hear the cornets when Mr. Gwynne comes back."

"Oh," began Linn, "couldn't you—would it be foolish to tell about the piano? It seemed so wonderful to us. And I just can't do anything but be an everyday fellow."

"There are a good many everyday people wanted to keep the world straight. About the piano, now."

"Prim, you can tell it the best of us all," said Chan, rather abashed.

She did it most entertainingly in her rapid descriptive way, and Mr. Collamore wondered how these little country children had come by their unusual gifts.

CHAPTER XIII

A ROYAL FEAST

"Now you must see the palace of the lions. Jules, pick up the rubbish and we will enter our triumphal car again," said Mr. Collamore.

"That sounds like old Rome," returned Linn. "Though it wasn't the lions that had the palaces very often. They brought them up out of the dungeons, half-starved at that."

"Are they truly palaces and not make-believe lions?" asked Primrose.

"They are sure-enough lions. Turn down here, Jules."

White marble houses, sure enough! Handsome and strong, looking as if they had been meant for the old Greek gods. There was one fierce, big fellow, who looked as if he would like to spring at the group. The next one was ramping up and down, and making continual protests, as if he would like to make a bound for liberty. The others were rather tame, sleepy-looking fellows. More tigers again, a royal Bengal among them.

"It seems a shame to spend all that money on the hateful things! Why don't they let them stay in Africa and devour one another?"

"They do not appeal very strongly to me. And I confess I should not like to meet one in his native jungle."

"The elephants are useful," remarked Goldie. "But you can't tame these to do anything useful and they *are* treacherous."

"If I were rich, I'd have an elephant, a white one, and I'd ride round on him," exclaimed Tip. "Did you ever ride on one, Mr. Collamore?"

"No. But children sometimes do at a circus."

"How do they get up?"

"By a small ladder. And as the creature takes very long steps it is sometimes like the swells of the ocean. Then there's the camel. I have ridden on him."

"Oh, do tell us! Did he cry and protest against unfolding his legs? I believe they have to fold them up to get clear down to the ground."

"I was in Egypt. Well, some of them are unamiable, but the most of them are good-natured. Yet, when they have load enough, they refuse utterly to take any more. Most of the keepers are very fond of them, and treat them like children. When you see a caravan loaded with all

manner of beautiful things, it takes you back to Bible times. And it is a very picturesque sight."

"Some one brought a lot of camels here to this country," said Linn, "but most of them died, yet it is said a few are still roaming around. I wonder why they don't hunt him or them up, and bring them here to the park. And they might take people out—making some money. There's something else I would like to see, the thing with a long neck—giraffe."

"They are graceful for all their long necks. I don't believe they stand being imported very well."

"Why can't we have a circus like we used in the little old house?" exclaimed Tip. "We haven't had one since we moved."

"We have had so many other things, and gone about so much."

"I haven't gone so very much," in an aggrieved tone. "Not to that swimming place, nor so often to ride——"

"But you have a private car of your own and you own the track, and everybody doesn't get an auto ride, nor a picnic in the park. It is delightful."

They had been going slowly about, past clumps of trees that suggested a small forest, little lakes where there were ducks and geese, pretty summer-

houses, winding paths and blossoming shrubbery, then spaces of wildness and suggestion of roads to come. And there were the city offices and the old Lorillard house, but the great rose farm was a thing of the past.

"After all," said Tip, as if he had been considering, "I think I'd rather have a goat than an elephant."

"He would be much cheaper to feed," said Mr. Collamore. "I don't think the elephant would forgive you if you offered him a tin can. They are easily insulted."

"But a goat doesn't really eat tin cans. A man comes along and buys ours. And some of the bottles."

"Would you like to have a goat?" asked their host.

"Well—I can't until Christmas," and the boy gave a big sigh. "And Laurel 'd be afraid."

"But why Christmas?"

Goldie explained that they were not to ask for anything until Christmas. "And I know Mother wouldn't like him to have one," very decidedly.

"Then a goat wouldn't be an acceptable gift," said Mr. Collamore.

"Now, children, you have seen most of the park. By the time you are grown it will be a

great deal finer and handsomer. Nearly all countries have beautiful parks, some a hundred or more years old."

They had passed pleasure parties and groups of children playing, but Linn thought he liked Central Park and the Museum better. Only the animals and birds here were alive.

"Now we will go across to the Hudson, and then down to the city and have dinner. I think you will be hungry again."

"It's been very nice, all of it," said Amaryllis. "And now when any one talks about the Bronx, we will understand just what they mean. We haven't seen very much, you know."

She was so simply honest. They were all very frank, without being rude, and did enjoy everything.

The drive over was full of picturesque places,—gardens of bloom, beautiful houses, then long unfinished stretches. They chose houses in a funny way, and then cast them aside for something finer. And presently they saw a little boy in a goat-cart, and Tip begged to stop.

"Oh, isn't he splendid!" cried Tip to the boy. "Would the goat and the carriage cost very much?"

"You can have him for half-price," replied the

boy. "He's an ugly old thing! He balks when he wants to, and he's turned me clear over. Why, he might have broken my neck. And Martin won't let me have a real whip, just this little good-for-nothing thing. If I had a whip I'd slash him good. He's been standing here—why, you might have run over me. And if he had been killed I'd had the splendoriest Shetland pony——"

His lordship the goat started off at his swiftest trot, and mounted on the sidewalk, where he stuck again. The children laughed, except Tip, who looked grave.

"What is a Shetland pony?" he inquired presently.

"They are very little horses, and nearly always amiable. In fact, they are cunning and intelligent fellows, and very affectionate. We have had several. Arthur had a beauty while he could ride, but he never went out alone, nor drove. Then we gave the pony to some cousins, who adored him. But I am afraid that little chap would spoil almost anything by his bad temper."

"Our Bonnie is just lovely. And the way she coaxes for a lump of sugar is too cunning. And she does understand all you say to her. We girls can drive her. Oh, I wonder what the boy and the goat are doing?"

They all laughed.

"Goats do have a little contrary streak in them," said Mr. Collamore. "Though the Swiss people make them very useful. But if I were a boy, I'd rather have a pony."

They came in sight of the river, but it was so full of boats going up and down that you only caught glimpses of it. And there was the boulevard with autos flying along—going up on one side and coming down on the other. There were dainty ones just for two people, elegant ones, with handsomely-gowned ladies, and they were all colors, it would seem, and the red ones made a dazzle.

"We'll look a few minutes, but I think we will not take the boulevard, Jules," said Mr. Collamore. "We can't run any risk with our freight."

"Oh, thank you," said Amaryllis, raising her soft eyes. "It would be splendid, but——"

"But you could not be sure of the other man."

So they took the quieter street, and that seemed crowded by spells. What a big, wonderful place the city was! Then they came to Central Park, which was gay with elegant carriages, ladies, pretty children with their maids, and what Primrose called "everyday children." One had a big rag doll.

"Oh, how Laurel would like to see her!" exclaimed Goldie. "They would be friends at once."

There was the pretty lake, with its boats and the swans sailing about loftily, and then Jules paused, as they turned into a broad space. There were donkeys, ponies, and oh, goat-carts.

"Now, children, you must have a change. Look about and choose your favorite steed. Tip, will you try a goat-cart?"

They were all alighting. "I think I'd like a good race," ejaculated Prim in a low voice. "I've been so proper and well-behaved that I am tired. Couldn't I run around in that little path and have it all to myself?"

Mr. Collamore was choosing a goat-cart. Tip was at the summit of delight.

"But I want to drive," he remarked.

"Yes, only the boy will walk alongside of you."

Tip stepped in with a grand air, wondering if the goat balked. He shook his horns and started off. Trot, trot, trot, and the boy laughed. The goat didn't need any driving—Tip half-wished he would do something, but, no, he was a well-trained goat, and there was nothing to disturb his temper. The boy turned him round at the end of the drive and he trotted back in fine style.

"Will you go down again, or try something else? Linn and Chan have taken the donkeys."

There was that cunning little pony. After all, he was handsomer than the goat. Yes, he guessed he would try the pony. He had been on Bonnie's back.

The pony was delightful, and its short legs had the same cunning "trot, trot," as the goat had. His eyes were so beautiful and expressive that when he alighted Tip gave him a hug, and he did wish he had a lump of sugar.

"You love him, don't you?" said the pony's keeper.

"Oh, we have such a splendid horse at home. She isn't very big, but not a pony. I ride her round bareback. She's just a darling."

Then the boy sat down on the grass. Tip told where he lived and about the eight children and his new father, who was so good to them all.

"He looks good," said the boy.

"Oh, that isn't Father. Maybe Mr. Collamore is handsomer," rather reluctantly, "but Father's got the beautifulest dimple in one cheek and a voice that has a merry laugh in it. And he isn't our very own father. He married my mother and took us all to his nice house to live. Which would you rather have, a goat or a pony?"

"Well, the pony would cost the most. But he's so loving and nice and almost talks. Well, he does talk with his eyes. And goats can't look at you that way. Sometimes they're contrary. Oh, the pony for me, for ever 'n' ever."

The boy's name was Harry. He and his sister lived together. She was a stenographer. This was vacation, and he earned three dollars a week with the pony. The man who hired him had lost his little girl, who owned the pony. Oh, if he could only buy it!

A new customer came. Tip sauntered down to Mr. Collamore. He and Linn were persuading Rilla to try the donkey. What big ears he had! But Goldie said it was splendid.

"Why, where is Primrose?"

She came to light then with a very red face.

"Oh, where have you been?"

"Just round there," nodding her head.

"There's the daisiest walk, and I ran clear to the end and back. It was splendid!"

"Ran!" ejaculated Mr. Collamore.

"Well, you see, I was so full and running over! The day has been so splendid and so mixed up with everything that I had to do something. I hadn't any paths to sweep nor garden to weed, and I just took a run to preserve the equilibrium."

Prim dropped down on the grass and began to fan herself with her hat.

"Prim, which would you rather have, a goat or a pony?"

"Oh, Tip, your goat will butt me over, if you are not careful. I wouldn't have either. Bonnie's good enough for me. And there's Rilla on a donkey! What next will happen!"

Prim's laughter was infectious. Mr. Collamore joined in it.

"It's fine," said Goldie. "We've all been—oh, Tip, what are you crying about?"

"Well, there won't anybody listen to me. I had a beautiful pony ride, and the goat was as good as he could be. But I can't tell——"

"Mr. Collamore, will you please not buy us *anything*! I don't believe Mother would like even a box of candy. And a goat or a pony or even a donkey would upset her. Oh, Rilla, how could you, and you are the one to set us a good example!" cried Primrose.

"You'd better try a donkey yourself, Prim," said Chandler.

"Will you, Miss Primrose? Otherwise I am afraid we must take to the auto."

One and another passer-by was pausing to won-

der what was happening to the group of merry children. They had quite an audience.

"No, I can ride Bonnie any day. But—a donkey? I couldn't think of such a thing! Oh, Mr. Collamore, is that ungracious? I forgot you asked me. I'd rather ride about this lovely park."

"Very well, then. Our auto is waiting here," and the host began to marshal the flock. What a funny lot they were, to be sure!

Tip had to go and tell the little pony driver good-by. Then they were helped in. Mr. Collamore had Prim on one side, Goldie on the other. Amaryllis was comforting Tip and helping him make his decision for next Christmas.

There were such attractive groups of children running about. There were the beautiful bridges, the long rolling swards, the pretty little vine-covered houses, the handsome Museum. But they could not stop then.

"We will have it for another holiday some time," said the host. "I shall come back presently."

"Oh, are you going away! But, of course, we couldn't have you all the time."

"I am going to sail on Saturday for Hamburg. And after two or three business days I am going down to Vevay, where my son is at school.

Then I'll take him over to Paris, and perhaps up to London. I shall have to remain there some time, and Mrs. Collamore is coming over."

"O dear! Don't you get tired of so much going about? I think I should," remarked Chan.

"Sometimes—yes." And he almost envied the man who had this gay, affectionate group about him, and came home every night to enjoy them.

They left the park with regret. There was still so much to see. But it seemed only a step before they paused at what looked to their inexperienced eyes a very palace, and were escorted up the spacious marble staircase, and to an apartment that, Prim told her mother afterward, was fit for a queen.

Mr. Collamore summoned a maid, and asked her to prepare the children for dinner, for they were a rather tousled lot now. She was very pleasant, bathed their hands and faces with perfumed water, brushed the hair, and said to Goldie, "What a lovely head of curls you have."

"If only it wasn't red."

"It's a pretty red, though."

"And my name is Marigold."

"Why, that's odd."

Goldie laughed. "And she's Primrose. And

her hair is a kind of yellow. There was a man once who wrote—

‘A primrose by the river’s brim,
A yellow primrose was to him,’

so I suppose a Primrose ought to have yellow hair.”

“And she has two such splendid braids. We, here in the city, would call it golden.”

“I keep snipping mine off. I don’t want it to grow long. You can just souse it in a bowl of water and give it a shake and run the comb through it, and it’s all right. I don’t like things that are a trouble.”

The maid smiled. Then she smoothed out wrinkles, pulled out skirts, and tied sashes over again, and they looked very much improved.

Mr. Collamore was waiting for them in the hall, and smiled as he convoyed them to the dining-room. The children almost held their breath, Tip’s comments being softly hushed by Amaryllis. Their host had Chan on one side and Primrose on the other, while opposite sat Amaryllis, watching in her ladylike way lest Tip should fall into some blunder. She was very glad there had been some nice training under Mrs. Alden. Perhaps they were all a little stiff at first.

Mr. Collamore had seen children and children, some very well behaved, others that he would have enjoyed sending from the public table. There certainly was nothing here to rasp one's nerves. And though they were so frank and ready to reply, they were not impertinent. Their table manners caused no anxiety, and he devoted himself to his nearest guests, wondering if this good breeding was a birthright.

They were very hungry. Mr. Collamore had ordered a simple dinner, but to them it was a grand feast. Primrose said to her mother afterward:

"I did not know what half the things were, but I was just desperately hungry, and they tasted so good. And Tip really was angelic. I don't believe Rilla once took her eyes off him. And we all talked in low tones, that is the style now; and you didn't need to ask for anything, because the waiter was going round and watched your plate. And when you had eaten what belonged to one course, the plates were whisked off, and some new things came on. Some of them I didn't quite like, so I didn't eat them. But when the dessert came on, I couldn't eat all my cream nor the lovely peaches, and grapes—think of that in midsummer! Of course we couldn't bring anything away——"

"I should think not!" exclaimed Mrs. Mann, horrified.

"We agreed we'd look at Mr. Collamore out of the sides of our eyes, and do things just as he did. But after all, it wasn't so very different from everyday living, but it's lovely to have everything handed you, and not have to choose between things. And such a magnificent place and such elegant dishes! But I wouldn't want it for steady company."

They were packed in the auto again and whirled down to the factory. Oh, how common everything looked, and—yes, it was dirty! And Father spent most of his days here that he might care for them and give them a lovely home and so many delights. The quick tears rushed to the tender eyes of Amaryllis—had they ever been grateful enough?

Their tongues certainly were loosened as they ran up the dingy stairs. They all talked at once, and every kind of adjective was used. The workmen had gone home, and Mr. Mann was awaiting them.

"Perhaps we are rather late, but we all have had such a good time. I don't know when I have enjoyed an outing so much, and they have all been the best children. So I am obliged to

you for lending them to me. Sometime I shall want to borrow them again," said Mr. Collamore in an earnest tone.

"I am glad they have afforded you some pleasure. Of course I couldn't do without them now," and Mr. Mann returned the hearty clasp of the hand. "I hope they have all thanked you, and I do, for them, most sincerely. They are in plenty of time for the next train," smiling.

"It's been the loveliest day!" said Primrose. "And, Mr. Collamore, there isn't any word to say how much I like you. It is right next to Father and Mr. Gwynne and——"

"Oh, don't put me any further on the list!" exclaimed Mr. Collamore, and Amaryllis cried reprovingly, "Oh, Primrose!"

"Well, why can't you tell people you like them when they've been so lovely good to you? There were all the roses and Chan's books and pictures, but this is the cap-sheaf, and we all have a share in it, and I shall think it over while you are away, for no one has been so jolly and nice since Father came. And we ought to like you very much."

Primrose's face had grown redder and redder, but she stood up so straight and fearless that Mr. Collamore wished he could have a picture of her at that very moment.

"My little girl, a thousand thanks to you," and there was a fervor in his voice that showed his deep feeling. "I shall be very glad to see you all again. And now, if your father will accept the auto to take you to the station, I shall think my day about perfect. I still have a little time on my hands."

"Think how you can be whisked about in a minute!" cried Goldie. "Tip, you had better wish for an auto."

"But it's so big! I couldn't run it," replied Tip with a spasm of modesty quite foreign to him.

They soon reached the station. It was well there was plenty of time, for the good-bys did get lengthened out. Then they found they still had some time. They all huddled about their father.

"I expect Mother will be worried half to death," he said, "though I sent a telegram. Dan will take it home to her."

"Nothing could have happened," interposed Linn. "The driver was so very careful and kept out of crowds. We stopped to look at some racing. They went like a flash. It was magnificent! But if anything had happened!"

"Oh, don't!" and Rilla shuddered.

Then they were off on their journey. They were beginning to feel tired. Tip leaned his head on

his father's shoulder and went to sleep, but the others kept thinking up this and that, that had escaped their attention at the time.

Oh, there was Dan, with the two-seated surrey. They were glad enough.

"Nothing happened?" said Dan, laughing. "Not one of you lost?"

"Oh, no! There was so much to see."

"And a big dinner in courses, so you could not hurry," explained Linn. "My, wasn't it fine! And a black waiter dressed to kill. See what it is to be rich! Father, what is Mr. Collamore's business?"

"I don't exactly know. Stocks and bonds, railroads and mines. He is a member of a big Wall Street house. And a very kindly gentleman."

"Oh, he's splendid! But, O my! He's strong on education, only he doesn't think every one can take it, and some seem to be born to just plod along. He believes the smart ones should have the chance."

Mrs. Mann was waiting on the porch, and ran over to the driveway to meet them.

"They're all right, Bessy. I told you nothing could happen to them," said her husband.

But she kissed them as if they had escaped a great danger.

"I've used up all the adjectives," exclaimed Prim, the voluble. "And I'm tired and sleepy. We had an extravagant dinner, and I couldn't eat a mouthful, now. I just want to go to bed. I'll talk all day to-morrow."

Tip dropped on the lounge, but Linn took him off to bed, coming back for a talk. Goldie and Prim had a drink of milk, and disappeared. But the two boys and Amaryllis did full justice to the glorious day and to Mr. Collamore.

"If it hadn't been for the auto," said the mother, with a quivering breath.

"It wouldn't have been half so nice. I don't think so many accidents ought to happen, and if they didn't go so fast! I'd go all round the world with that Jules."

"Water and all," appended Chan, with a funny little smile. "Mr. Gwynne goes about in one, and Mr. Collamore takes his over to Europe. And oh, Mother, Tip had a ride in a goat-cart, and then on the daintiest pony. You'll have to help him decide to-morrow which he will have."

"Oh, Rilla, oh, Linn, you didn't let him beg for anything?" and there was such a genuine distress in her face they all laughed.

CHAPTER XIV

A CHARITY WORK

MRS. MANN had to hear every one's story the next day. "There's enough in it for a book," Goldie said. "It isn't often such a thing happens to a crowd of children. I think we have wonderful luck."

Dan had to take his share, and was very much interested. The pony and the goat were absorbing questions.

"Why, you'll soon be riding Bonnie," said Dan.

"But the pony was so—well, you'd want to hug him and feed him lumps of sugar all the time," replied Tip.

"And that would be expensive. Of course *I'd* like the pony best."

"*You* couldn't ride in a goat-cart," and Tip studied Dan up and down.

"No. I wouldn't know what to do with my legs except to cut them off."

"But you wouldn't cut them off!" in a horrified tone. "Why, you could run alongside, as the

boy did. And we saw another goat that was real ugly. That boy offered him for half-price."

"And you didn't buy him?" in pretended amazement.

"Well, you see, I hadn't any money. I couldn't have brought him home, and he couldn't have run as fast as the auto, if I'd led him by a rope. And Father didn't say I could have one. Christmas is a long way off," and Tip sighed.

"And you might change your mind."

"Oh, no, I shall always want a goat. The boy at the park had such a nice one. A man lets him have it, and he gets paid three dollars a week for just holding the reins. Why, I might make some money, for everybody has to pay for the ride. Gee! Mr. Collamore must have lots of money."

"And about the animals, now."

That set Tip off again.

The twins and Amy were entranced with the day's pleasure. And Cap brought her patchwork and listened to the wonders, for it seemed almost as if they must have been to Europe.

"And now," said Cap, "since you've had such a fine time, you must get your mother off on her journey. She deserves a holiday, and she can go just as well as not."

They had almost forgotten about it, and the

little mother hoped they truly had. But Friday evening as they sat out on the porch half listening to Chan's dreamy playing, Mr. Mann spoke of it as a certain thing. He would not go down to the city Saturday morning. There was a train for Oaklands at two, and that would give them nice time to get a little settled before supper. And having the twins there would prevent any real anxiety about home matters.

Bessy was so taken by surprise that she could not stem the current. And Mr. Mann had written.

Saturday morning a note came from Mrs. Burnham. They would meet them at the station, and would be happy to welcome them in their new home, and have them see their new and delightful people. Katy was counting on the twins.

So the suit-case was packed, but Laurel could have filled another with things she was sure Katy would want to see. Every time the anxious mother stole out in the kitchen, Cap met her with:

"Now don't you worry a mite. Everything'll go just as straight as a string, but land sakes! I've seen some crooked strings. We'll have enough to eat, an' you won't need to be afraid the twins will fall in the cistern, for you'll have 'em with you, an' there ain't any open cistern. Just you have a good time and make your husband happy,

for the Lord knows he's deservin' of it. Dan'll see everything's safe."

So they kissed everybody and started off. Amaryllis cleared up her mother's room. Linn took his little brother and went over to the Bradleys', and the boys went for a fine drive. Stuart and Dick had been to Bronx Park, and they compared notes. But Tip declared Central Park was ever so much better, with its boats and donkeys and goats.

"O dear," began Primrose, when she had sat still for about ten minutes puzzling over an intricate crochet pattern, "doesn't it seem lonesome! Suppose we didn't have any mother."

"Don't, Prim," entreated Rilla. "You're so funny, and yet you can think up horrid things."

"But if we'd never had one——"

"Then we wouldn't have been born, and you could not think up impossible things."

"Well, it's lonesome."

"But Mother and Father have been away before."

"Mrs. Alden was here then."

"You can imagine Mother's upstairs sewing."

"But we can't hear the machine."

"Get the book and look up some of the beautiful birds. We ought to——"

"Improve our minds," put in Goldie sententiously. "I was just thinking of that pretty maid at the hotel. Oh, wasn't it superb! And there were maids going about the hall with their black gowns and white ruffled aprons. Do you suppose she truly thought my hair nice?"

"Well, it *is* pretty," returned Amaryllis. "I wish mine curled."

"Oh, there's some one coming," broke in Prim. "It's Mr. Evans, and—yes, Miss Evans."

Primrose ran down the path. "Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "Now our mother's gone away and our father too, and Tip and the twins, but we haven't cried yet."

Mr. Evans laughed.

"We thought you might like to see a familiar face," said Miss Evans. "And we have not heard about that auto ride. Weren't you afraid?"

"Why—no. There was a splendid chauffeur."

"Elizabeth thinks she would surely be smashed up if she entered one. I think they are quite delightful."

"Oh, this one was splendid. A big touring-car. And it has been taken to Europe. And Mr. Collamore runs back and forth, just as we might go to New York."

"You have some wonderful travelers for

friends, Miss Firth. There's Mr. Gwynne——”

“And it's funny, but Chan found them both, all on account of his winning voice. He is out in the swing, reading.”

The two other girls rose, Amaryllis a little in advance, and received the guests with a pretty cordiality. Yes, their mother *did* get off, for Cap insisted upon it. “And I'm sure Mrs. Burnham would have been disappointed.”

“You have such responsible help. And it does one good to get away now and then.”

“We are going to have a vacation in about a fortnight,” said Mr. Evans. “A friend is coming up to spend a little while with me, and offers me the Sunday out. So we are going to take a trip to the White Mountains.”

“Oh, that will be delightful.”

“We have some friends staying there for the summer, and that will make it pleasanter. But we shall be going about as far as our purses will allow,” and the clergyman smiled. “I think I'll go and hunt up Chan,” and he rose.

“I wish you would take off your hat and stay to tea with us,” said Amaryllis to Miss Evans. “We settled with Cap to have supper to-night, as our family had shrunk so. Oh, please do,” in a persuasive tone.

"My dear—thank you. We will see what brother says. So you had a grand trip?"

"It was just royal," returned Goldie. "I did feel a little afraid at first, but we did not go very swift until we left the city and had a clear road. I should be terrified to fly as some of them do. And the animals in the Bronx were very entertaining, especially the black bears, who played and wrestled like boys. But the birds were the most beautiful. And oh, how they sang!"

Amaryllis rose and excused herself a moment. Cap was sitting on the back porch in her clean calico frock and white apron, singing hymns and sewing patchwork.

Oh, yes, they might as well stay as not. There was the cold ham, and she could make a salad out of the remnants of the chickens. Why, she didn't mind the trouble; well, it really wasn't any trouble.

Mr. Evans agreed very readily. He always felt so at home here, but he did miss the little mother.

It was quite delightful. Amaryllis made a charming head to the table, and Tip, being in a rather thoughtful mood, was left undisturbed. Cap was very proud of her young mistress.

They took Miss Evans out to show her the garden and the swing, and Goldie told over the sad

story of Mrs. Peacock. They had set out a white rose on her grave.

Amaryllis was a little behind with Mr. Evans. There was something she wanted to say, to ask, but when she had said, "Mr. Evans," she stopped and colored.

"Well?" with an encouraging smile.

"There is something I would like to tell you—to ask you"—and she hesitated.

"Anything I can help you with, I will do gladly."

"It's about an old lady who lives at Denby. She has been old ever since I can remember, and she's very unhappy, I think, and lonely and ill. Her husband died years ago, and left her part of the house to live in, some garden, and several other things, but the son's wife isn't very good to her, the neighbors say. Oh, she's very queer and maybe not pleasant to get along with. She used to come quite often to the little house, and Mother would give her a loaf of fresh bread and some nice fruit. The son worked at the creamery, and his wife used to be out all day visiting the neighbors. They lived on a sort of lane away from folks. And she has such funny ideas. She always said to Mother, 'Now, Mis' Firth, would you rather be lost at sea or wrecked in a train?'

and she always seemed in dead earnest. She'd never even been on a train."

"Couldn't she decide?" and a smile lurked around the clergyman's lips.

"Then she would say,

'If you're wrecked on the land, there you stand.
If you're wrecked on the sea, there you be.'"

"That's funny, when you are not likely to meet with an accident either way."

"I went over a while ago. Mother sent some things; we'd heard she was too weakly to get out. And she looked so poorly. She can hardly get about, and her voice shakes so, and her eyes have such a sort of frightened look. And oh, she was so hungry. And—sometimes old people die—oh, I don't just know how to say this, but you're so kind and pleasant, and clergymen can talk to people—and sometimes they pray with them. Oh, I wouldn't want to die all alone!"

"You dear little missionary!" Mr. Evans took the soft hand in his. "Oh, I understand—there isn't any one at Denby."

"Mr. and Mrs. Burnham would go and try to comfort her, but there is no friend, and every one seems so busy. Mrs. Briggs is good and kindly,

but her daughter is in bed with rheumatism. Then it seems as if a minister knows more about heaven——”

“My dear child, if there is anything I can do——”

“You and Mother might talk it over. Denby church isn't quite like yours——”

“But God's work is the same everywhere. It is to the poor and needy.”

“And we've had so many nice things happen to us. I've thought it over a good deal, but Mother was going to have such a lovely visit that I didn't want to disturb her. But I think she would be very glad to have you go, and I'm so sorry for Granny Keen, though somehow one would have to try very hard to love her. But she isn't an enemy,” and Mr. Evans could almost feel the smile in the girl's voice.

“You are very good to think of her.”

“And you will come over and see Mother?”

“I shall be very glad to——”

Chan caught Mr. Evans's hand.

“Now if you want your sing, come in. I've been going over those new hymn tunes, though I believe they are old. I like them so much.”

They all went in and had a delightful time, until Miss Evans said they must go, and that she

seldom had such an enjoyable visit. They were all charming little housekeepers.

Then they prepared for bed. Dan chained the watch-dog outside to satisfy Linn, but there seldom were any marauders about. Cap would be clear upstairs in case a bear came to disturb Tip's slumbers.

"I shouldn't be afraid of those two funny bears," he said, "but I wouldn't like that big, cross-looking one about."

Nothing happened. Sunday morning was splendid, and they went to church and then to Sunday School. But they admitted they did miss the twins,—and oh, Mother and Father!

They were so busy on Monday they didn't mind very much, but Father came home all alone, and there was consternation.

"Everything is all right. They were very glad to have us, and we have had the best time. The new home is very pretty, and the church people are so cordial and hospitable. Mrs. Burnham had settled on a kind of a tea reception for this afternoon, and wouldn't take any refusal, so Mother really had to stay. Katy is bright and well, and the twins are having the time of their lives. Five little girls were coming in to tea. And the church is very nice and cozy. The peo-

ple look so bright and interested. It must inspire a man to preach to such a congregation, even if it isn't very large; and Mr. Burnham gave them a first-rate sermon. Oh, Mother'll tell you all about it. But I had a very nice time, though I'm not much on visiting. But I took part of my family along," and he gave a merry laugh.

Mother would come home the next day. Mr. Burnham would come to Oxford with her, where they changed cars, and at four-fifteen Dan was to meet her at the station.

They were merry enough all the evening, and the next day busy as bees. Cap finished the ironing. Marigold made over "dest dolly," and gave her a bang in front and two fine braids, and washed and ironed all her clothes. Amy came up a while because she was so lonesome. And a bevy of school girls called, but the very best of all was the dear mother. Rhoda held the floor, however, and they had to hear about the children's tea, and the real ice cream that was pink and green, beside the white.

Mrs. Mann listened helplessly. Rhoda's sharp eyes had missed very little, and she was quite a critic already.

"But they didn't have a swing like ours, and they haven't horses nor carriages nor a spandy

new piano that stands up straight. It's just like our old one. And—and the house isn't as big as ours, but it's all real nice, and we had a good time, didn't we, Lal?"

"There were some pretty little girls and one of them had a great big doll, big as a live baby."

"And one had a pink silk frock, and she wasn't as big as I am," went on Rhoda. "I like silk frocks."

"But if you had one, Lal must also. And two would cost a good deal," said Goldie, gravely. "Why, I even haven't a silk frock, nor Prim, nor Rilla."

"But Gladys has."

"You see, she is the only child in the family."

Rhoda looked perplexed as she surveyed them all rather ruefully.

Tip hung around his mother, and said he didn't want her to go away again, it was too longevity.

"Well, I guess it was," returned Chan, "though we don't generally use it that way."

And when Mrs. Mann sat at the table with her husband and children around her, she felt as if she had been away a month.

Still it was very nice to know the Burnhams were so well placed and happy. There were so many new outlooks that she could not worry about

Katy all the time, and the child had more of an opportunity to develop naturally. She would go to school in the autumn.

So it was the next day before Amaryllis found an opportunity to lay her consultation with Mr. Evans before her mother.

"Oh, Rilla! I had been thinking if the poor body should die without any one to say a prayer over her. My dear, it was very thoughtful in you. We must go over this very day and see how she is, and how she feels about it."

They took a basket of luxuries with them, but poor Granny Keen was in the bed, looking more wretched than ever, in a faded gown, and her white hair tumbling about.

"She had a stroke yesterday," said Mrs. David. "She would putter round. And I'm sure I don't know what to do. I'm no hand at all in sickness. and I don't think Dave can afford a nurse, and we're out of the way of neighbors. Dave's planned to paint this fall, and the old house needs it bad enough. He's got about half saved up. And the doctor said this morning her heart was strong, and she might last a long while. I don't know what I shall do. I can't stand it waiting on her night and day. If you'll wait a spell, I'll go and see if I can find Polly Finch."

"But Polly Finch is—she hasn't all her senses."

"Well, it's the best I can do," and Mimy Keen was off.

"Poor Granny!" said Mrs. Mann soothingly.

"What do you want first?"

"My face washed." She spoke with difficulty.

"'Taint been washed in a week. Then gimme somethin' to eat."

Granny partly raised herself with the help of one arm, and then fell back, beginning to cry.

Mrs. Mann brought a basin of water and washed the poor wrinkled face and hands. Then she looked up a clean night-dress and brushed the tangles out of the tumbled hair. Under her tender manipulations the poor old soul fell asleep.

"Rilla," said her mother, "we'll clear up a bit. I'm sure Granny is worse than they think. I'll kindle a fire, and make some broth out of the stewed chicken, and we'll fix the bed and sweep up. I don't see how Mimy could let things go so. And if we could find a better quilt——"

They went to work. Amaryllis swept. Her mother looked into the pantry at the end of the room and found some fresh bedding. They fixed the bed, put a clean sheet over the sick woman and a tidy patchwork quilt. Granny never moved, but breathed heavily. Rilla wiped off the dust, shook

the cover of the table, and settled articles in a more orderly manner.

Then they went at the kitchen. These two rooms were all of Granny's part. Bonnie was tossing her head and whinnying, as if she said it was time to go. Rilla took her out a lump of sugar and patted her. Mrs. Mann made a bowl of broth, and had the kettle boiled for some tea, when Granny woke.

"Who's that?" she asked sharply. "What smells so good? I'm starved. That toast was burnt black. Oh, yes, a cup of tea. I ain't had any in a month. If I could get about! What do you s'pose is the matter with me? All my side feels like a log! Why, it's Bessy Mann! I've been comin' over——"

"Drink this broth. It will warm you up."

"Oh, how good! Mimy's an awful poor cook. An' you alwers make things taste so nice. Have the Burnhams gone away? I 'most forget. O dear! I hoped I'd keep able to hobble around. I feel so much better. Shouldn't wonder if I'd be able to get up in the mornin'. I want to get well and come over to your house."

Then she lay back on the pillow, tired out.

Rilla and her mother washed up the used dishes, straightened the pantry, threw out some bones and

the odds and ends of dry bread, and put away the food they had brought.

"The Burnhams have gone away, Granny—don't you remember? Would you like to see some one,—a minister to comfort you a little until you are able to get out? We have such a nice minister at Grafton. And—if there's any one else——"

"Yes, Mis' Briggs. She's so good. I ain't been able to get there in a long while, and Lidie's in bed, they say. We're out of the way of most people 'cept those flyaway folks of Mimy's. An' they don't come in here. Oh, I don't know what I shall do!" and the poor soul began to cry again.

"There, Granny—I don't believe the folks know you're ill in bed. I'll let them know."

"I'm sure I've always been sociable like, but somehow folks don't mind——"

Mrs. Mann was considering. If she could find Dan's mother, Mrs. Wilson, to come and stay all night.

"Rilla," she said, "I think I'll try to find Mrs. Wilson. She's so good in sickness. You won't mind staying here while I go for her. We can't leave her alone. And there's no telling when Mimy'll be back. I think Dave will be in soon."

"Oh, no, Mother."

"If she wakes up, give her some broth."

So Mrs. Mann took the reins and started Bonnie in the way she didn't want to go, turning down the lane. She was glad to see Mrs. Briggs, who was picking beans in the garden, and came as Bessy beckoned. Bessy told her at once of poor Granny's plight.

"Yes, the doctor said when he was in on Sunday that she'd had a stroke. He thought she must have had one before. He doesn't come for Lidie now, she's so on the mend. I'll try and go over to-morrow. If you could get Mrs. Wilson! For Mimy's off half the time. Poor old lady! It's been pretty hard for her. Mimy thought she ought to be sent to the poor-house, but husband said her lawful home was there while she lived. He told Dave so. Well, I hope she won't suffer long."

Mrs. Mann drove along, and found Mrs. Wilson at home. "Yes, I can come for the night, for several days if they want to have me. Oh, the idea of taking in Polly Finch! Why, no one would trust her in sickness. Mimy Keen's as close as the skin, a plaguy sight worse than Dave, and they're savin' up money."

Mrs. Wilson made herself ready, and they soon arrived at the little cottage. Dave came out.

"I don't see where Mimy's gone," he began.

"You're awful good. Poor old Mother's laid up, but I hope she'll soon be about again."

Mrs. Mann shook her head. "You must have the doctor in to-morrow, and I've brought Mrs. Wilson, for she will need a steady nurse. I will be over again to-morrow."

Dave was quite nonplused and looked embarrassed. "Why—the doctor didn't think——" He paused. He had not seen the doctor.

Granny was asleep again. Mrs. Wilson hung up her hat and stood her satchel in the closet, then went to look at the poor patient, who was as gray as if already stricken with death.

Rilla led her mother into the pantry. "Dave came in and looked around," she began in a low tone. "He took the ham and three of the biscuits, but I said the chicken was all for her."

"That was right," but Mrs. Mann flushed. "Granny could not have eaten the ham, but he had no right to take it.

"Mrs. Wilson, I'll be over to-morrow, and we will see what is best. There's some chicken broth for her, and I brought some farina. I hope you'll find enough for supper and breakfast. And don't have that miserable Finch thing in."

"Indeed, I just sha'n't. I'll keep things straight."

It was a good half-hour later when Mimy came in. She'd been chasing all round, was tired and cross, and Polly wouldn't come.

Dave had made some tea.

"Did those folks leave anything in the other house?" with a motion of her head. "For she can't eat anything."

"They brought Dan Wilson's mother, and I guess she's goin' to stay. An' the doctor's comin' to-morrow."

"Who's goin' to pay for all this?" she demanded angrily. "I could have slept in there, though she does groan so it breaks up all your sleep. I'm 'most worn out with two nights of it."

"There's three strokes gen'ally before they go."

"Well, I think there was one about a month ago. Sometimes the last one follows soon."

Then she went in to interview Mrs. Wilson, but she was a little ashamed to question her closely.

"I s'pose Bessy Firth holds her head pretty high now, but it isn't so long ago that she was workin' round in people's houses, so she needn't be so set up."

"I think she takes her good fortune very quietly, and is ready to share it with others," was the pleasant reply.

Mr. Mann and the children were on the porch

watching for Mother and eager to hear what had kept her so late. Cap said the dinner was spoiled.

"Oh, why didn't you eat it while it was nice? You know you've said we must not wait for you."

Mr. Mann laughed and kissed her.

They all felt very sorry for poor Granny, but they could not help smiling over the funny calls she had made them, and Rilla thought of the day she had been making jam and felt so impatient with the old lady. She was glad she had not said anything positively cross.

The next day the doctor said frankly that Granny would never be any better. The paralysis was going up the left side, and would probably be gradual. She might last two or three weeks. Yes, they must have a steady nurse, and he was glad to see Mrs. Wilson there. Give her broths and such things, whatever she craved.

"It isn't as if she was his own mother," Mimy flung out.

"But she was a good stepmother. And for three years she took care of his father when he was about helpless and wandering in his mind. Folks thought she didn't get very high pay for it."

Yes, Mimy had heard that more than once, and she couldn't well contradict the doctor.

"Mrs. Wilson will take good care of her," he

went on. "You see, she must have some one all the time."

So Mrs. Mann found things in tolerable order when she went over the next morning.

"The poor creature's nothing but skin and bones," Mrs. Wilson said. "And she's that hungry! I don't believe she's had enough to eat for a month, since that lameness in her hip came. She was a great hand to get about when she could, and one and another would give her some little thing she wasn't likely to cook. Then she's had her chickens and eggs, but I guess Mimy's helped herself pretty well to the eggs. There's about a dozen little chickens and I might as well use them up, I think."

"Yes," was the reply.

Then Mrs. Briggs came in. Granny roused herself and seemed quite bright.

"I want a real chicken cooked," began Granny, "not any of your bits and bones. Oh, Mrs. Briggs, you know I was to have my livin' off the place, an' I ain't had it good for a long while. The squire he writ it all out. Mimy was good enough at first, but last spring her aunt wanted to hire these two rooms, an' since then it's been hard as stone fence. I'd like to live ten years longer jest to plague them! The squire said they

couldn't get me out, when I asked him," and the poor old body sank back on the pillow breathless.

"You're not such an old woman yet," said Mrs. Briggs soothingly. "You shall have the chicken and whatever else you want."

The two women talked about Mrs. Burnham's delightful change. Mrs. Mann described the pretty parsonage, and the agreeable people.

"I don't know what's got into Denby people," said Mrs. Briggs energetically. "Since the women have taken to doing shop work so much, they can't think of anything but money. I do hope we get a good, stirring minister who'll bring them up to the sharp point. They'd got so used to Mr. Burnham they didn't pay any attention to what he said. And Mrs. Burnham was a nice, good woman."

"I wonder," and Mrs. Mann paused and colored, "Granny oughtn't die like a heathen. There's such a nice minister at Grafton. Do you think——"

"Well, he's as near as Mr. Brookfield. Why, yes. It don't make so much matter when one is dying if you haven't quite the same faith, so long as you believe Christ can save. Yes, I wish you would bring him over. It was a good thought to get Mrs. Wilson."

Then, after giving a few orders, the ladies went

home. Bessy found even the larger girls being entertained by Rhoda's account of her visit to Oaklands, "only Katy didn't have such a swing, nor a great big flower garden, nor such pretty little guinea chicks, nor a big playhouse with closets and shelves. But the ladies who came to tea were dressed in such splendid frocks, but none of the little girls had dolls that could talk or walk."

Amaryllis was much interested in hearing about Granny. Then in the mid-afternoon Jennie and Myrtle Read came over. The girls were getting up a picnic. The mothers had consented and were to head the party. There was a beautiful place called Wilkins' Grove, where pleasure parties often went. It had tables and seats and a stone fireplace, where you could boil a kettle, and a high hill that was covered with trees like a mountain side, but when you were up at the top, there was a big round place, so it was called "Round Top." It was a long walk, but there wasn't any other place so beautiful. And they could have Mr. Morris's big wagon to take the dishes and provisions. And numbers of the school boys said they would go.

"Yes," declared Linn. "The Bradleys are all going."

"And they'll have a first-class time."

"Oh, Mother, can't we go?" cried Prim.

CHAPTER XV

NOT ALL FOR PLEASURE

THEY were all eager but Amaryllis. Somehow she seemed changed, even to herself. Linn was off with the boys, or down to his father's factory, and she and Chandler seemed now to have more fancies in common. Both were fond of poetry, and now she had grown to love music dearly, though it was mostly Chan's playing. She could achieve the simple little things; indeed, Mr. Mann was very fond of them, and now she enjoyed playing for him.

But she felt sometimes that she was curiously changing. She had been like a little mother to the other children the last two years they had lived in the old red house, but there had been no need here. They had all been merry together, but she seemed some way to have outgrown them, to have new thoughts and desires, to study things that even Linn did not care much about. Chan seemed to understand many of them, but what was still a sealed book to both of them was the tardy dawning of a suppressed girlhood. Mrs. Alden

had helped develop it more than her mother, who had never had just this experience. Yet the new realm was very sweet, quite too vague, even for dreamland.

She felt at first that she would not join the picnic. Chan did not care to go.

"But I wouldn't like to have Prim or Goldie go without you, they are so thoughtless."

And Prim said, "It would be awful mean of you, Rilla. Seems to me you don't care half as much for fun as you used to. And we haven't been anywhere—about here," laughing.

"Oh, I'll go," returned Rilla cheerfully.

"And so many of the school girls will be there, and they will have plays and lots of fun. I want vacation to be filled up with fun. And Father's going to take us to Central Park to that splendid museum Mr. Collamore told us about. And then there's a place that's talked about, Coney Island, that's just running over with fun, and I want to go there before we come down to the hard pan of study again."

Amaryllis thought a great deal about poor Granny. Now that she had a more generous diet and cheerful society she did seem to improve in some ways, but the paralysis kept creeping on. Her mind was just vague enough to enjoy being

waited upon and consulted about small matters, childish enough to delight in fresh caps and a nice spread on her bed.

Mrs. Mann had spoken to Mr. Evans, and he had accompanied her to the Keens'. In her early days Granny had been religious, after the fashion of a good many country people, but it had gradually worn off, and it was a long walk to church. But she was pleased that the new minister should come to visit her; and the old carping habit seemed to fall away, since there came newer things in her life. Mrs. Wilson had had a long experience with a childish invalid.

"Rilla," her mother said one day, "there is some one we ought to hunt up, and I've thought of it numbers of times. Do you remember the Mr. Yates who took some of our old things when—when we were coming over here?" and she blushed like a girl at the remembrance of the Christmas that was hardly a year yet. "He'd taken in a poor lady that must otherwise have gone to the poor-house, and he was poor enough, Heaven knows. I'd like to know how they get along, though Mira Pierson was always considered pleasant and nice."

"Oh, yes," returned Rilla. "He thought we were going to have a 'vandue,' " and she laughed.

"Oh, yes, let's go. Isn't it queer that there are no real poor people about here?"

"There is nothing to call them here, and it would cost too much for them to have homes. I dare say there are enough of them at Ridgewood. And when you come to think, most people at Denby own a little house and garden, those who are not rich enough to have farms. But they are so sort of indolent and thriftless."

So they went over one morning. It was a sort of back road, some little places lying between the large farms. By dint of inquiring they found the Yates place. There was a nice garden and a bit of pasture lot for Mooley, and some flowers around the front.

"Father," Mrs. Yates called through the window. He came from around the back and stared at the surrey and the two ladies, then exclaimed,

"Bless my soul, if it ain't Mis' Firth! No that ain't your name now—I can't always get a name right the first time of tryin'."

"Mrs. Mann," she said, with her sweet smile.

"Glad to see you, ma'am. Mother, here's the lady who sent us such a lot of things. She that was Mis' Firth, livin' at Denby."

Mrs. Yates came out. She had her sleeves rolled up, but she pulled off her soiled gingham

apron, and her calico frock was tidy, if it had been faded by frequent washings.

"It was awful good of you, ma'am. We've been thankful a thousand times. An' we've got just the best little grandmother you ever see, and we've made her so comfortable. I told husband we'd never miss what she ate, for we don't have to buy much beside flour; husband works out a good many things. An' it just seems as if Mira Pierson brought us good luck, for some such nice things have come to pass. I'd be proper pleased, if you'd get out a bit and see her. Our house isn't much, and I hear you're quite quality over to Grafton."

"Why, yes, we shall be pleased to," returned Mrs. Mann.

Mr. Yates helped them out. "Fine little mare that, and shows good livin'. Lemme see, didn't you have a lot of children? I hope they're all thrivin'."

"Yes, thriving and happy, and I hope you are all well."

The room was clean, but the rag carpet had been patched in several places, and the big rocker was cushioned with what might truly be called crazy work. But everything was neat and tidy, and Mrs. Yates's invitation was so cordial.

"Miry," she called, "here's Mrs. Mann from Grafton. Oh, you can't think how happy them things made us! I'd felt so sorry for Mira, I just wanted her with all my heart. It's so nice to have some womenkind to talk to and to plan with. You know the old saying, 'Two heads are better than one, if one is a pin's head.' And growing boys ain't much company. This is Mrs. Mann, Mira."

Miss Pierson came and held out a slim hand, full of blue veins, but white as any lady's.

"I'm mighty glad to see you," and there was a smile in the sweet, tranquil face. "You don't know all the good you've done. Why, I felt almost 's if I was a queen in that nice bed. An' out of them bits of old frocks and things we've pieced two such nice quilts, and put in odds and ends of wool that weren't of no account to the shearers. An' I'm so happy I don't know how to thank the Lord enough. I hope He's prospered you. We heard you had such a nice husband and a plenty of everything."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Mann. "I've thought of you so often, and wondered how you managed through the winter."

"Oh, we were very comfortable," answered Mrs. Yates. "We had plenty of wood, and if

you can keep nice and warm and have enough to eat without any one grudgin' you a mouthful, you're pretty well off, I take it. An' Grandmother's the dearest body. Why, the boys here think she's a nonesuch."

"Well, when folks are makin' you happy all the time, it's your place to be thankful," and Mira smiled with a sort of girlish winsomeness. She had been a pretty woman in her day, and all her misfortunes had not soured her. Though her hair was snowy white, there was a shade of pink in the wrinkled cheeks. But the loveliest of all was the sweet gratitude written in every line; content was what made the old face lovely.

"I s'pose this is one of your children," said Mrs. Yates. "You're lucky to have such a nice big girl. I've always wanted one. Though I couldn't keep her like this. My dear, I wish you'd accept a bit of gingerbread,—it's the only kind of cake I can afford. And a glass of milk."

"Thank you," returned Amaryllis. "I should like it very much."

It *was* good, and carried the girl back to the little old house, when gingerbread had been one of the luxuries of their lives.

"If you could find room, and didn't mind a

few more old things, and Mr. Yates could find time to come over for them, I'd be very glad to get them out of the way," said Mrs. Mann, with her sweet smile, as she rose to go. "We have had a very pleasant call."

"And I'll be very thankful for them. It was nice for you to come, and we shall be glad to see you again.

"There's a real lady for you," said Mrs. Yates, as they waved their hands in farewell. "You'd almost think you were doing her a favor, as she puts it. And she's pretty as a June rose. It would be heaven if the Lord had put more of such folks in the world."

"I think sometimes the Lord gives them the stuff, and they make themselves. He isn't going to interfere until the very last. Martha Yates, you'd be just as good with plenty of money. The folks that think of the poor and needy when they're poor, are going to keep it up when they're better off," replied Mira.

Amaryllis and her mother drove along a while in silence, then the girl said:

"It made me think a little of ourselves, Mother. Only we never patched our carpet," and she laughed with a lovely kind of mirth.

"You were a great hand at cutting carpet rags,

and how Prim and Goldie used to sew them! Then you all wore out clothes so fast—you see, they were handed down from one to the other, and didn't last very long. I was wishing for some one I could donate a lot of things to. But the Bachmans are so thrifty, and I don't want Denby folks to think we are making a show of our abundance. There'll be plenty of things for Cap to have, if she should want them."

Rilla squeezed her mother's arm.

"Isn't it just lovely to have things to give away," the girl exclaimed, "things that will do some one good? And I suppose there is lots of rubbish in a good many of the Denby garrets—but everybody can't seem to understand—that is not quite the word I mean," knitting her brows, "how to make things over so they will look nice. I saw some pieces of old Aunt Hitty's things in the chair cushion. And I wonder how *you* came to have so much ingenuity."

Mrs. Mann blushed and laughed. "I've heard that 'Necessity is the mother of invention.' And I had no end of necessity."

"And poverty must be the father. We had that, but it seems now as if we couldn't have been so very poor. Oh, do you remember the day the five dollars came? Why, it seemed a fortune!

And I had such a pretty new frock. Why, Mother, it seems like something out of a book!"

"We have had many blessings, dear."

That was true. After they reached home they went up to the storeroom, and looked over the pile of things still remaining. There were some of the old clothes from last summer and autumn, out of which might come serviceable pieces, chairs that would still give some wear, a discarded suit of Mr. Mann's, pictures no one had wanted.

"And here are some boys' clothes. Why—oh, I suppose they belonged to the Gedney boys. They are really needed in the Yates family, though I daresay Cap would accept them for her brothers. But Mr. Terry is what people call a forehanded man, if he is close," with a bright little laugh. "Now we will do up two piles and have them ready."

"It will be as good as Aunt Hitty's old things. Here is a cloth cape that will be nice for Grandmother. How lovely it was in the Yateses to take her. They knew how sweet and amiable she was, and how ready to do anything that she could. Oh, Mother, I'm going to try to keep sweet-tempered, so that if I should live to be old, I'll be a nice old lady that some one will be glad to offer a home, if I should need one."

276 *THE RED HOUSE CHILDREN*

“That is the way to look at it, dear.”

“I don’t suppose any one would have been glad to offer Granny Keen a home. We would not have taken her in with the gladness Mrs. Yates shows.”

“It’s good she has a home while she lives. And I dare say she and Dave’s wife might have been better friends, if each had considered the other a little more.”

CHAPTER XVI

A HOME PICNIC

THERE was another delegation of girls about the picnic in the afternoon. Mollie Sherman was almost sixteen and going to the High School.

“It’s going to be quite a grand time! We meant at first just to have a sort of jolly time, with a few girls and boys, but several of the mothers have taken it up, and ’most every girl in Grafton wants to join. Celia Elliot’s home from boarding-school, has brought her cousin, and they’re just as eager as can be. It’s rather funny, but there are not a great many large girls in Grafton. There are a lot of youngish married folks and elderly people who have no children, and who just come for the summering. I think we’ve gathered up everything that we want, and we count so on you, Rilla, and that funny Prim and Goldie. Oh, you won’t disappoint us! There’ll be Mother and Mrs. Read and Mrs. Morton and Miss Kent to keep us in order, but it is *our* picnic, and we mean to have lots of fun.”

"I'm not quite sure," said Amaryllis hesitatingly.

There was an outburst of persuasion.

"Oh, you must, you must! Linn is sure to go, and all the boys are nice boys. And the man who looks after the place said he'd put up the swings. You know the farmers have a grand time there right the last of August. That Mr. Scott was real nice and clever."

Rilla really did not want to go. There were so many things to do at home. Mother was making over some frocks for the twins, and Rilla loved to sit with her mother and talk while they sewed. But if she did not go, Prim and Goldie would have to stay at home.

"Of course you'll go," said Linn in a rather authoritative fashion. "You've almost lost sight of the school girls. And presently you'll be right among them!"

Then Rhoda insisted that she must go.

"Laurel wouldn't want to, for, you see, Amy isn't counted in. And I'm such a big girl that I can take care of myself," holding her head up very straight.

"But you couldn't join the plays with the big girls. You'd have to sit up alone——"

"I could run about. And I could eat some of the good things—and I could take some of my books to read, just as Chan does. Oh, you'd be mean not to take me."

"Mother said no."

"But if you wanted me, she'd say yes."

"We don't want you," and Prim could not resist a mocking laugh.

"You're a mean old thing! And when I get big and have a party, you shan't come to it! I hope it will rain and hail and snow, and you shall stay out in it and freeze stiff, there now!" and Rhoda began to cry.

That had no effect, so then she bawled. You could hear her all over the house.

"Rhoda," said her mother, "go clear upstairs. I will not have such a noise here," and taking the little girl by the shoulder, she started her on her journey.

Rhoda stamped her disapproval on every step. When there were no more steps she sat down to think. And at last she had it. There were no more tears. She would run down the street and meet her father, and just coax him in her sweetest way. And when he had once said yes, Mother would have to give in; she always did. And the others would have to. Prim thought she was

some great things, bossing everybody. She'd see!

The plan did work to a charm. Mr. Mann stooped and kissed her. "Where's Lal?" he asked.

"Oh, she and Amy are playing dolls. Lal's funny. She stays so little, and—she doesn't have any big thoughts. I don't care very much about dolls."

He laughed.

That was the auspicious moment. She was caressing his hand and skipping lightly by his side, and told him how much she wanted to go to the picnic, and that she wouldn't be a mite of trouble. She hadn't ever been to a picnic except last summer when he took them that afternoon, and it was so splendid! And if *he* could only go now.

He kissed her and said she should go. She was very sweet and amiable, and condescended to go down and swing with Lal and Amy.

Mr. Mann went upstairs where his wife sat sewing.

"What's this about the picnic?" he asked.

"Oh, the girls, mostly school girls, have planned it for day after to-morrow. The three girls are going."

"Why not Rhoda? Her heart's set on it."

"There will be no little girls. She would be only a bother. She's forward enough now."

"And I said she could go."

"When?" raising her eyes.

"A few moments ago. She was so earnest about it."

"After she had been told she could not go! The girls do not want her. She must be punished for this. They think they can coax anything out of you."

"Oh, see here, Bessy, childhood goes fast enough. I wish I had some fun and pleasant things to remember. They're not always wise, but I don't believe their folly is going to hurt them much in the after days, not as much as the keen disappointments."

Bessy gave a hopeless sort of sigh.

"Are you sorry you gave them to me, Bessy?"

"Sorry!" she raised her soft, sweet eyes.

"I'll tell you what we will do," he said. "I'll come home early—Thursday, isn't it, and take you and the twins. You must not stay in the background forever. I'll fix it with Rhoda, and some other time we will deprive her of a pleasure. Don't break the heart of the poor little thing. And if in the future you should compel me to get

a divorce, I shall pick out my half of the children first."

She didn't want to smile, but there was something in the man and his love for them all, his lonely childhood and the years of dissatisfaction, that always went to her heart.

Rhoda was very good and proper, but she kept out of her mother's way. At dinner he asked Primrose about the picnic, and had quite a glowing account of the plans.

"Would I be too old to come?" he asked humorously, the dimple in his cheek deepening.

"Oh, it would be just too splendid!" cried a chorus of voices.

"Then when you've had the wildest of the fun and have toned down a bit, I'll drive out with Mother and the twins. Please save a little of the good things."

"Are you in real earnest? Oh, Mother, will you go?"

Prim hugged her mother rapturously.

So it was settled then and there. Rhoda wasn't *quite* pleased, but it would be rather fine to come out with both parents.

The next morning Mr. Yates drove over for his "donation" with a note of thanks from his wife, that was really touching.

"You's a good woman, Mrs. Mann," he said in a rather shaky tone. "Heaven ought to bless you and yours."

Then Rilla and her mother went over to Granny Keen's. The paralysis was creeping slowly upward, but her mind seemed clear and she could use her arms.

"Your minister was over here yesterday," said Mrs. Wilson. "He's such a tender sort of man, talks to her as if she was a little child he was trying to lead back, and she's grown so childish! She doesn't find fault even about Mimy, and I thing *she's* kind of ashamed of the way she's treated the poor body. She may live a week or two, the doctor says, but she's nothing to take care of."

It didn't rain on Thursday, though they were all quite sure it would, and it was not so hot as it had been. Dan took the girls and Tip and the baskets of eatables; Linn was going to walk with a lot of the boys. It was not so far, less than two miles to South Meadows. That was really the end of the county and of Grafton's bounds. Most of it was rather small farms. Then South and North Meadows were fine farming and grazing land, and over to the eastward rose hills covered with forest trees, making a splendid windbreak

for the farmers. There were some fine trees on the borderland, enough for a nice shade, and here a plank table had been set with rough benches around it.

Already a group had collected. There were a number of mothers, and you would hardly suppose Grafton could have turned out so many growing children. The Chedisters would have been shocked.

There was a very friendly feeling, as if they all were on the reception committee. Neighbors who had barely nodded or spoken at church on Sunday, were cordial, and seemed amused at what they called the children's picnic. Farmer Boldrein, who took charge of the grounds, had put up two fine swings. There was a stream meandering round,—“the creek” it was called,—and at one side was a spring of splendid water, that had been stoned around like the neck of a well and covered over so that cattle should not disturb it.

They sat down on the grass in groups, planning what they should do. There was an immense black walnut tree that was like a tent for shade, and a good many others. And down towards the south there were reaches of meadows, some with their late crop, fields of waving corn, and here and there patches of wild flowers.

Some of them went to swinging. The girls began to play "Tag," and soon all was merriment. The mothers gathered in a little group, and grew very sociable. Several brought needle-work or crocheting.

Oh, how the merry voices and the varied musical laughs rang out! There were some envious birds singing, as if they did not want the children to have it all.

Mrs. Bradley had that morning received word that a cousin she was to look for some days later, would be in at eleven. They would come after a little lunch.

"And what next?" inquired two or three.

"We could make a good big ring for fox and geese."

So fox and geese it was. There were rows of three all around and an odd one in the middle. The fox was outside of the ring, walking slowly around seeking an unwary goose to capture. If he saw four in a row, that was his chance. But if the fourth one saw him coming, and ran inside, across the ring perhaps, the fox had to run around, and then no doubt the goose would be sharp enough to lead him another dance. But they did get caught and then there was a shout.

"Children," said Mrs. Read, "aren't you getting hungry? Shall we set the table?"

Yes. They really were a little tired. They had brought paper and wooden plates and napkins, and now these were laid about and the provisions brought out with bottles of cold coffee and tea, and lemon-juice sweetened for lemonade. Should they have a fire?

The boys wanted the fun of it, and brought some brush. Soon they had a blaze. The ladies thought hot tea refreshing. They were getting in their places round the festive board, when Stuart Bradley jumped up suddenly, crying,

"Oh, there's Mother and Cousin Jane!"

Mrs. Bradley and Miss Greatorex were warmly welcomed.

"Linn," exclaimed Fred Austin, "your father and mother ought to be here to make the party complete. Oh, why didn't we send them a special invitation? We've had such nice times at your house."

Prim's face was a struggle between reticence and the desire to tell a secret. Marigold had a queer look as well.

"Oh, they *are* coming!" cried Dick. "No, you can't deny it. Why, that's splendid! Our picnic

will be a grand success. Why, it was a lucky thought of you girls!"

"And we did not plan for so much," laughing.

Miss Greatorex dropped into a vacant place, warm and tired, and began to fan herself.

"Why, this is a splendid place with all those windrows of hay and those long, long meadows. And is that a street down there, or, to be more artistic, a lane?"

"They *do* call it a lane. There are three bungalows," Mrs. Sherman made reply, "those queer, spread-out things with a sort of Chinese look. Some artists are living there, though they go away for the winter. The lane," with a funny little emphasis, "runs clear down in town, but a long bit of it isn't built up. We're a sort of a suburb of a suburb, and properly we are Ridgewood."

"Do you know any of the artists' names?"

"They keep very much to themselves, and we don't trouble them. I've heard the names," in an indifferent tone, as if it was hardly worth while to give them a second thought.

"The man who has those two little girls and drives them around in a donkey-cart, is a Mr. Morland," explained Grace Conover. "I don't know about the others."

"Thank you. We of the city haven't known just where Ralph Morland had hidden himself away for these two summers. That is the man I was telling you about," to Mrs. Bradley. "It was thought first that he had gone to Europe after his wife died. The children are beautiful."

At the lower end of the table the boys and girls were flinging all manner of funny jests at each other, and devouring the eatables as only hungry children can. But there comes an end even to children's appetites.

"What next?" asked one of the boys. "We have a long afternoon before us."

"Not so very long either. 'It's rods, poles, and perches after one o'clock.' Now that's an improvement on saying 'miles.' Would the big folks care if we decamped? We came for fun, you know," and Dick rose.

"Hello! What's that?"

They all looked at the two advancing oxen and the immense vehicle. Some of the girls caught each other's hands at sight of the great horns.

"It's a hay rigging. Let's go up and say in our most beseeching tones, 'Please, Mister, won't you give us a ride?'"

It was a broad, burly farmer in his shirt-sleeves,

with a very red face, shadowed by a wide-brimmed straw hat. He came on toward the party. The children looked at each other as if they had been caught in a conspiracy.

"Havin' a good time, be ye? Why, there's quite a crowd of ye! Et all yer lunch up?"

They glanced at the depleted end of the table with a shamefaced air.

"Nothin' like havin' good appetites. Ye look purty good for city folks. Ye must put in all the runnin' ye can. Now I'll speak a word to the old folks. Hope ye like it hereabouts."

"It's fine. We're much obliged to you for granting us the favor."

"Sho' now! Ye're welcome. There's no orchards or melon patches near by," and a funny twinkle went over his face, even wrinkling up his rather stubby nose.

His interview with the grown people seemed very satisfactory. Then as he backed out somewhat awkwardly, he faced the group of girls and boys. Stuart said, by way of making talk, "You're going to get the hay in. There's a lot of it."

"Got 'bout half in yist'day. Yes, then the rain won't catch it. But we'm havin' a ruther dry time fer some things. Good haying weather,

though. See here, want to ride down to the last stack? I'm beginnin' there."

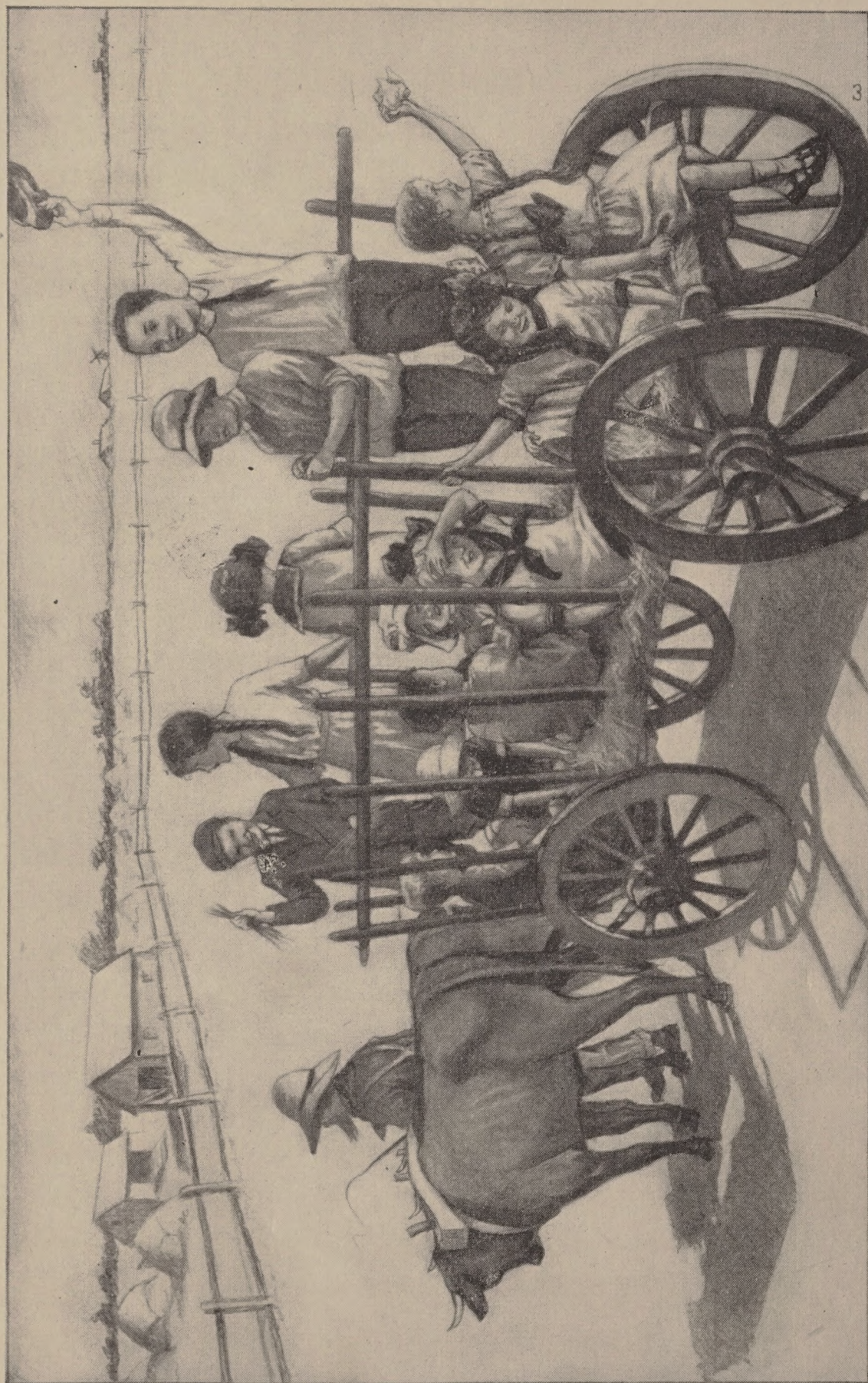
"Oh, oh, oh! could we?" in a joyous chorus.

"Yes, if ye can stan' oxen an' riggin'. I'll put in a little hay for cushions, so's ye won't get banged up. Now I'll have to h'ist you gals in," and he held out his hands. Prim stepped courageously forward. He caught her under the arms and gave her an upward throw. She came down in a little heap, and righted herself with a laugh.

Some of the larger girls turned back. After the other girls were in, the boys were invited to help themselves. There was a deal of scrambling. The oxen stood patiently chewing their cuds until their master started them.

There was an exclamation that was almost a scream, as it seemed as if they were going to be tipped over, and then came the gayest of laughs. Down the level meadow with nothing to break the way they went, until the last great mound was reached, when to their surprise a man, who had been lolling in the stack, rose up with a pitchfork in his hand.

"These here youngsters ain't goin' to be buried, Jabez, so you c'n help 'em out. It's like sleddin' in the winter, the sleds have to be toted back.



DOWN THE LEVEL MEADOW THEY WENT.—Page 290.

An' ye'll have to do your own trottin', if ye want to come agin. Ye're all welcome, I'm sure. I ain't seen such a jolly lot of young uns in a month of Sundays. Ours were all merried long ago, an' strayed off."

They all scrambled out, some giving a big jump. Then they watched the hay being packed in. What a quantity it took to fill up the great rigging!

"We've got to go up to the barns, but we're comin' back. It'll all be right."

They ran races on the homeward way, and found the elders still at the table, though most of the paraphernalia had been cast in the stone fireplace. There was some food left, but they were not quite hungry enough for a second dinner. It had been just splendid, they said, and they were going again.

"Couldn't we walk over to that lane, or whatever it is?" asked Miss Greatorrex. "I would so like to find Mr. Morland."

Mrs. Read and Amaryllis went with them. The sun slid under a cloud now and then, and made beautifully changeful lights. The lane or, at least, the built-up side, had a fine row of trees that shielded it from curious eyes. The tenants were out on the lawns sewing, reading, and talking.

There was a sleigh-swing with a crowd of little ones.

No one seemed curious. They came quite close, and then one man sprang up.

“My dear Miss Greatorex! Are you not lost in this out-of-the-world place?”

“You see, you are not quite out of ‘humanity’s reach,’ but it is by the merest accident that I have unearthed you. My cousin, Mrs. Bradley, is living at Grafton, and I generally bestow myself upon her a brief while in the summer. To-day we are having a picnic of girls and boys, and some one mentioned this artistic settlement. If you are very good to me, I will keep your secret,” with a rather teasing smile.

“Thank you. I will be extremely good. First I’ll introduce you to the coterie. We have not fled from the wicked world in disgust, but this was a lovely quiet spot to work in after the rigors of the winter. We are some distance from a railroad station, or from neighbors, and have various beautiful views—what more can a man or woman ask? I have my two little girls with me. They are here in the swing. I hide them away lest they shall be spoiled by the vain, flattering world.”

They were beautiful children, girls of five and seven, the finest of the Kate Greenaway type.

"The youngest suggests Laurel, doesn't she?" said Amaryllis.

"Amaryllis! What a poetical name! And who may Laurel be?" asked Mr. Morland.

"She is my little sister. She is not so pretty, but——" and Amaryllis blushed.

"And there is a flower garden of girls," remarked Mrs. Bradley. "There are eight children, and their mother looks like a girl among them."

"Eight!" with a mirthful whistle. "Have you brought them all along?"

"No, only six. But the other two are coming."

"And I think you'll want to paint one of them," the lady went on. "That's Marigold, who has a crop of curly red hair, the dark Titian red, and the daintiest mouth, the gayest being you can imagine. But I'm saving my favorite for Miss Greateorex."

"And what flower may she be?"

"She is Primrose with golden hair. Oh, you would want to buy them up, if you saw them all together. And one boy will be a great singer. I suppose you did not hear those two young cornet players in New York last spring,—Mr. Gwynne's discovery?"

"I heard them abroad. They play one marvel-

ous piece. I hear he has been offered a big price for the score."

"And there is a charming story back of it all. I shall not tell you now. Some day it will come out. You had better come over and see them."

Miss Greatorrex had been talking to another of the men that she had met at an artists' reception. But she and Morland had been friends a long while.

Then the ladies said they must go. There was a little badinage between Miss Greatorrex and Morland.

"How large a picnic?" he asked suddenly.

"Four mothers. Twenty or so school children. Simply a day of fun for them. And a splendid ride in a hay rigging by a benevolent farmer."

"Could an outsider have a look at them?"

"They are in Mrs. Bradley's keeping."

"Well, I'll besiege her. I want to see the eight children."

Mrs. Bradley consented. Nysa, the eldest Morland girl, begged Amaryllis to stay until dark and have supper.

"Why, we might take the children. Clara, would you mind giving them a ride?" he said to the nurse-girl. "They can't walk there and back."

"Why, no," and she went for their carriage.

But Nysa wanted to walk, holding the hand of Amaryllis.

"What a sweet little maiden that is! She ought to be put in a poem—Greek at that," said Morland.

"Or Wordsworthian," suggested Miss Greatorex.

It was a very pleasant walk. The party of artists would remain through September for the glowing lights and the ripening tints of autumn. Morland would spend the winter in New York. Miss Greatorex had a fancy for Lower California.

"Better take Alaska in the winter. There might be some fine scenes," he laughed.

"What do you know about this redundant household?" he asked presently. "Is their father a millionaire?"

"No, and he is their stepfather. Mrs. Bradley is very enthusiastic about them. She would like to buy one of the girls. And there are five."

CHAPTER XVII

FARMER DENT

MR. MANN had come home early. Chan had not cared for the boisterous fun, but he was ready to go now. The twins were put in clean white frocks, but their hair wasn't quite as artistically curled as Prim's dainty fingers did it.

The children, at the picnic, had romped and played in one dilapidated hay-mow. There would be only about half a load going home. The farmer sat down on one end of the bench and mopped his face.

"I've had a first-rate time," he declared. "I often think I'd like to have been a school teacher, you have young folks about you all the time. They're bad an' they're good, they're smart an' they're lazy an' dumb sometimes, but there's somethin' about 'em that finds a way to your heart, though you don't think so much of it then. But when you git old, and they are all gone, some West, some dead, and you sit by the fire alone, you jest hanker for the young voices an' the sort

of disputes that raily don't mean anything, an' the little hand that creeps round your neck an' coaxes something out of you. Our little Bob had that way. An' he was a master speaker, too, used to beat 'em all at school. Do boys speak at school now? They have so many new-fangled idees. Ther' was one 'bout a great Turk, how he thought he was goin' to have everything his way an' conquer a great country, but the other people had a first-class leader, who told his soldiers to strike for their altars and their native land. I disremember it mostly——"

"Oh, that's 'Marco Bozzaris,'" interposed Linn eagerly. "It's fine."

"Can any of you boys say it? I'd like to hear it once again."

"You, Stuart. It just suits you."

Stuart declined with a gesture.

"Yes, yes," persisted Linn.

Stuart rose and did his best, which was excellent. Farmer Dent's face was a study, and he drew his rough hand across his eyes. Some of the others came to listen.

"Thankee! thankee! my lad. You couldn't have done a nicer thing for me. It 'most brings back little Rob—he wasn't such a big fellow."

"Where is he now?" asked Linn in a low tone.

"I guess he is in heaven, sonny. He was good enough to go there. An' Jim's a big farmer up in Canada, an' 'Lisha's got a boat that goes up and down the Pacific Coast, and Hank's down in South America, where they raise such lashings of wheat, an' Jane's in Michigan—her husband's got part of a copper mine. An' ther's only Mother an' me to sit in the chimbly corner. Now I'd like to see the rest of you eight children," and he rose.

Tip had come down with the second relay. He was devoting his energies to building a goat-cart. They went round the table, where the grown folks were in a little circle admiring the beautiful children who posed so often it was second nature to them. But Nysa had been loth to yield Rilla's handclasp. Mr. Mann had Laurel in his arms, and her sunny head was leaning on his. Rhoda stood up very straight, trying to think she was almost as beautiful as Nysa, if she only had on such a lovely frock and splendid blue ribbons. Hers looked rather the worse for the day's wear. Tip and Chan stood by their mother. Morland was studying the group with an artist's eye.

Mr. Dent came up in a rather awkward fashion, taking his old hat off with a bow.

"I've had a fine time with all these young folks,

but I want to see your eight together. And I have a favor to ask."

"And this is my husband, Mr. Mann," Bessy said in her pretty way, and she longed to add, "The best father children ever had. And here are all the eight," with a tender laugh.

"Well! well! An' you look jest like a new-blown pink yourself. They're a fine lot, ma'am, an' I hope you'll have no end of comfort when they're grown. But 'pears like you take the most comfort when they're little, runnin' round under your feet, an' you most tread on 'em. Then they grow up an' stray off an' it ain't jest the same any more. An' I jest want to ask you to lend 'em all to me for a day, so's I c'n show 'em to Mother. They're jest like a bunch of posies. I'll come for 'em an' bring 'em back. An' that one that said the 'Marco' verses, I'd like him."

Stuart had gone up with Linn, and now he smiled and bowed.

"I ain't never had jest such a time before. Mine didn't get so clost together. Mother, she'll jest go wild over 'em. Some day next week, now?"

He smiled down into their faces, and thought he had never seen such a pretty lot. And the father of two beautiful children thought there was

not a handsome one among them. Chan came the nearest, but was rather feminine.

Bessy's face was almost like a damask rose. Of course she had to make a reply.

"You'll find so many of them quite troublesome, I'm afraid——"

"That's what I want. I don't like the cut-and-dried children, who can't run or laugh or holler. Oh, we'll jest have lots of fun. Don't dress 'em up fine, nor put on their Sunday shoes. I want to give 'em jest a good day. An' now tell me jest how to find you."

Bessy looked entreatingly at her husband. Mr. Mann rose to the occasion. He was sure they would have a happy time, and if they came home safe and sound, that would be all any one could ask. He and his wife were much obliged for the friendliness as well as the day's pleasure here.

Then Mr. Dent bowed, and hoped the company had had a good time, and backed out of the throng, turning once to Stuart.

"You'll be sure to come," he said. "You'll seem like a big brother to the rest."

"That's like a bit out of a play," began Mr. Morland. "I don't see how Mrs. Mann dare trust them all to a stranger."

"No one will kidnap the whole eight," said

Miss Greatorex laughingly. "If I'd had a kodak, I'd have snapped a picture of the old farmer. And that little Laurel in her father's arms! They are wonderfully picturesque children."

Then there was a stir and a host of "good-bys," and "the nicest time we ever had," fairly rent the air. Linn and Stuart had their wheels, Bonnie took the mother and the three younger children and Lady Betty had a surrey full. Dan would come back presently for the master and some of the guests.

"And you've all come home alive!" was Cap's welcome. "I s'pose you're hungry as bears, and I've got a rousin' good dinner. Lamb potpie, and a great rice pudding fit for a king. Did you have a good time?"

"Good isn't any word for it! There'll have to be a new dictionary written. Rides in a hay wagon, tumbles, and slides in a haystack——"

"And if the farmer 'd been there, he would have given it to you——"

"Well, he was. The queerest, oddest-looking man, sunburned even to his hair, and his little fringy whiskers and just the sweetest, jolliest, full-of-fun man you ever saw. And his laugh was the merriest! And he has asked us to come

for a day. He lives 'way over back of the picnic place and Mother said we might go."

"And you don't know anything about him!" cried Cap in consternation."

"His name is Dent, and all his children are grown up, and have gone away. It's queer that folks begin by thinking eight children such an awful lot, as if some of them should be drowned like the kittens you don't want, and when they come to see us, they think we are nice——"

"Oh, Marigold!" ejaculated Amaryllis in a tone of disapproval.

"Well, we *are* nice. We don't quarrel very much, and we never throw things at each other, and we are always on the lookout for fun. Nearly everybody I find likes fun, even to Gladys Chedister."

"And there were two such lovely little girls," broke in Primrose. "Their father is very aristocracy, and paints pictures and lives in a bungalow. I'd like to know what kind of a house or shop or mansion it was, but the little girls looked as if they were made out of 'sugar and spice and all that is nice,' and the beautifullest frocks, and a nursemaid just to wait on them and keep them clean. But they never would or could be thrown up in a hay rigging! It would frighten them to

death. Rilla, did that biggest one really *say* anything to you? My! s'pose they were deaf and dumb?"

"No, they are not," returned Rilla. "I suppose rich people want their children brought up so they *can't* make any mistakes when they go out, and so they can tell just who is in their set. Seems to me they miss a good deal. And there are lots of nice people in the world, if they can't dress in silk and have diamonds. All she said was 'yes' and 'no,' but she held so tight to two of my fingers that it made me feel sorry for her."

Mr. Mann had just come, and they all went in to dinner. And they *were* hungry. It was a wonder how they could eat so much and talk too.

And then they were tired and sleepy, and no one had to coax them to go to bed.

The next morning they found the Rosses were coming up to stay over Sunday.

"How long it seems since we've seen them. They'll always make me think of Mother's marriage. And it seems as if we must have been living in some other country."

"Why, we did," returned Primrose. "Denby. And a little old red house. And made-over things. And selling eggs and our best fruit, and Mother

going out to work. And even then we were jolly. And then we were invited to this country, and had a lovely father bestowed upon us, and a splendid Christmas, and Bonnie and Lady Betty, and such wonderful friends, and now another new one. Children, we're singled out by fate and fortune. The ghost of Granny Keen will come shaking her head and saying lugubriously, 'You're born, but you ain't buried.' I don't want to be buried in a long while yet."

They went about their work with merry hearts, but now and then they had to pause and laugh over yesterday's fun. Mrs. Bradley came over with Miss Greateorex, who quite fell in love with Chan and his music. Primrose found out what a bungalow was, and they talked over the little girls who had no mother. Miss Greateorex could not quite approve of their being brought up in such a formal fashion, as if they were the children of a prince.

"And it would be a dreadful disappointment if they shouldn't grow up to the promise of their beauty."

They were to come to tea at Mrs. Bradley's next week, five of them.

That evening Mr. Mann brought up the other guests. The Ross girls seemed to have grown

a good deal and were quite citified. Mrs. Ross discussed their future plans with Mrs. Mann. They were going to buy their home in a pretty suburb across the Hudson. There would be almost two acres of ground and a convenient, modern cottage with a very good school nearby. Mr. Mann had been so good, encouraging Mr. Ross to take this step. For the city was getting so overwhelmed with immigrants that there was hardly a nice place to live in unless one paid an almost prohibitory rent.

And they talked about Mrs. Alden, whose son's wife was now in consumption. There was no hope for her.

"But she misses you all so much," said Mrs. Ross. "I don't believe she'll ever be so happy anywhere else."

"And we ought to write to her oftener," returned Mrs. Mann. "But there seem to be so many things to do."

Mrs. Ross had not cordially approved of Mr. Mann's choice, but she admitted the great joy of his life was the children. But Bessy made a most delightful wife. And Mr. Mann had gained so much assurance and character.

The girls discussed school and studies. The elder meant to be a teacher, only it *did* take such

a long while to go through all the branches. What would Amaryllis do?

“I don’t think I should be smart enough for a teacher. I’m not very quick at learning, though I like some things. But I take to housekeeping,” and she smiled. “Mother will need me, there are so many to grow up.”

“I just wish we could afford a servant. But Mother says we can’t until the house is paid for. I don’t mind dusting, but washing dishes and sweeping and all that——”

“We wash dishes Monday morning and always on Sunday afternoon. But Cap is so quick about everything and so good-natured,” said Amaryllis.

“But you’re always so good to her. You can’t get such servants in the city. And then to think of your having a horse and driving around! You are a lovely girl. And that splendid swing! I mean to coax Father to buy one, for now we will have yard space enough. But there’s only space for drying clothes in our old yard. And we’ll have flowers.”

Mrs. Mann said they could invite four girls in to tea, and have it by themselves.

And Linn begged for the Bradleys, and they had it at five o’clock, a real high tea, with cold meats, and nuts and candies after the cake. Then they

had a fine time out of doors, and they sat a long while on the porch talking over the stories they liked.

"Oh, I wish I could stay a whole month!" sighed Elsie Ross. "Grandmother is very fond of us, and she's at the seaside, you know, and that's supposed to give you a good deal of health and strength. But to have a pony and go driving round."

They had to leave quite early Monday morning so as to be in summer-school in time.

"I enjoyed myself so much," said Mrs. Ross. "Everything seems to go on so smoothly. I don't know how you do it with so many children."

Amaryllis went over to see Granny Keen, who was slowly failing, but Mrs. Wilson said she was very little trouble. Then she called on her friend, Eunice Williams.

"She's been sick all day," said her mother in a sort of resentful tone. "Wash-day, too. She tried a little, and then she had to go to bed. I don't see what's got into the girl. And the Williamses are all such strong, hearty people. My! before I was that old I'd do a family's washing, and then go out to tea or maybe a quilting frolic in the evening. Seems to me, girls ain't worth much nowadays. She studied all her strength away in

the early summer over that foolish project of going to the High School. If you like to go up and see her—if she's asleep don't wake her."

Amaryllis went upstairs. Everything was clean, trust Mrs. Williams for that. Eunice had tried to beautify her room a little. She had framed some pictures, embroidered her bureau cover, and braided some rugs for the painted floor.

She raised up her head. Her face was quite flushed, and her eyes showed traces of fever.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" cried Amaryllis, clasping the thin hand.

"I'm much better now. My head ached this morning. If I could have stayed in bed! But it was wash-day, and after I'd cleared the table I went to rubbing some of the clothes. Then I was awfully sick, and here I've been ever since. But my head doesn't ache now. It's so good of you to come."

"I thought you might take a drive on Wednesday. We had such a splendid outing last week—I want to tell you all about it. But I oughtn't stay now."

"Oh, I don't believe I can go. There'll be so much to do. You see, I'll have a whole day to make up. I generally sew Monday afternoon, and

iron some in the evening. Oh, wait until next week."

Mrs. Williams was coming upstairs.

"Here's some broth for you, Eunice. She hasn't eat anything to-day. What you girls find to talk about so much, I can't see. I should think 'twould make your headache worse."

Mrs. Williams sat down with a thud, as a hint to the visitor that her stay had been long enough.

"I'm tired myself," she said rather crossly.

So Amaryllis said a tender good-by.

"I do believe that girl does nothing but drive around. If I was the man I'd be saving up a little money for old age," Mrs. Williams said when she heard the hall-door shut.

Eunice tried to wink some tears out of her eyes. Amaryllis was wondering if there was anything she could do for her. If they could only have her a week over at Grafton.

Then she stopped at Mrs. Briggs's. It was a plain country home, but it had such a cheerful aspect. Grandmother sat there knitting. Lidie was crocheting some pretty mats. There was a vase of flowers on the little stand and the cat was curled up on the end of the rug.

"Rilla," began Mrs. Briggs after the first greetings had passed, "I don't know but we'll have to

tote away that minister of yours. I had such a nice talk with him at Granny Keen's. And Mrs. Ludlum was there—her husband's chief deacon, you know. And as we were walking home she said, 'Now, that's the kind of minister we want, and a young man who is attractive would build us up.' I wanted to say all the girls and old maids would be fighting for him in no time," and she laughed merrily.

"But the—the service is so different," returned the girl with a quick breath.

"Oh, yes. He wouldn't come, of course. I do believe some Sunday husband and I will drive over. I do want to hear Chan sing. You don't know how we miss you all—and Linn. And I don't know as we'll ever get a minister, the salary is so small. Mrs. Burnham was a fine manager. And now there seems no one to go ahead. We haven't planned any Sunday School picnic. And the scholars are falling off."

Rilla told them about the girls' picnic and what a gay time they had, and Lidie was so interested and laughed about the ride in the hay rigging.

"Oh, Rilla, do come in real often. You do one so much good. And you folks have been so nice to Granny. Your mother just hit it sending for

Mrs. Wilson, but Mimy's in an awful stew as to how she'll get paid. I'll tell you a secret, Rilla, but you may tell your mother. Granny some years ago gave Father a little money, because she said she wanted a decent funeral. And she's been adding to it and we mean to see that she shall have her wish. Father was counting it up last night and he's sure there will be enough to pay Mrs. Wilson besides. She's been so good to the poor old soul."

"Mother thought——" then Amaryllis paused with a flushed face.

"I dare say your mother would have made up anything, but I think Denby people should have looked after that Dave, if anything was wanting. But there won't be any need. Granny wouldn't trust the money to Dave, though Mimy's the one who has grudged her the shelter. She can't last much longer. And Mrs. Wilson says your minister is as nice to her as if she was some great lady."

Rilla was very happy to take these tidings to her mother. They almost offset Mrs. Williams and Eunice.

"And we're asked over to Mrs. Bradley's to tea to-morrow evening," announced Linn.

"People are so good to us," declared Primrose,

dancing round. "But it seems to me, we ought to give a party."

The five of them went, all clean as pinks after a shower. They stood a little in awe of Miss Greatorrex at first, they had hardly seen her at the picnic. But she was very affable, and told them some bright stories. They were behaving very decorously; there was no hay-wagon to bring out boisterousness.

Amaryllis had trained them a good deal after the manner of Mrs. Alden. She seemed to adopt nice ways so naturally. And it was rather funny, but Prim and Goldie watched her closely when they were out, to be sure they were right, for their mother always said, "Did you mind Amaryllis?"

They had to discuss the picnic and they found some new fun. Then Mr. Bradley came home and they had supper, after which they retired to the parlor. Mr. Bradley begged them to repeat their Robinson Crusoe rhymes, and Prim must tell one of her entertaining stories, which amused Miss Greatorrex very much. Then she must hear Chan's songs and the bird concert.

"That is certainly wonderful," said the guest.

"And now that we have displayed all our varied accomplishments," began Prim, "I want to

hear that fascinating violin. And Father said I should have one at Christmas."

"But I told you you could learn to play some on mine, and the lessons are free gratis for nothing," said Stuart.

"But I always want to dance, and then——"

"Oh, don't say that I am cross."

"You might have a tableau,—'the first violin lesson,' " proposed Mrs. Bradley. "Primrose, you won't mind if he is a little cross. There's a funny little exercise in his book. Dick, bring it here and let us look it over. I am sure you can do it."

Primrose looked rather disconcerted, and stole a glance at Miss Greatorex.

"Oh, you need not mind me," she said, with a laugh. "I often pose people for painting. Some seem made of whalebone, and flung out of place at once, others are mushy and drop down with a stage fright. Come, now, let us see," and she started up. "Stuart, you'll have to imagine a violin, or use anything."

He placed Primrose in position. Then he began to beat time. "Now." Primrose made an awful squeak, and stopped.

"Oh, Prim, you can do a great deal better than that. Now, again."

If they were only out in the little summer-

house, with no one looking at her! She had half a mind to throw down the violin and run away. Miss Greatorox rose, and placed her in proper position again.

"You see," Prim said, rather embarrassed, "I can play better on an imaginary violin. Let Stuart take it, and I'll go through with the motions."

"Yes," responded the mother. "You did it so well that first time you were here."

"I think I'd like to have something for a bow."

"Well, I have two."

The real music began. Primrose was intent upon listening. Linn thought she wasn't going to make believe at all, when Stuart struck a gay measure, and she started up, handling the bow as if she were used to it. Indeed she had played make-believe to the children in the swing on imaginary journeys. Then Chan played a low accompaniment that was a mere echo. It was so charming that Stuart forgot the part of the cross teacher, and nodded to Marigold, who joined in. Faster went the violin, and Stuart said in the lowest of tones, "Now the grand waltz, Prim," and the girl was off like a flash. The yellow braids danced up and down, her eyes were brimming with laughter, as she made the daintiest turns and circles and little pauses, then flew on, fairly enchanting her

audience and then suddenly sat down with a mocking sort of laugh.

"It's all the fault of the music," she cried. "The dance is in me, but the squeaky, quaky screaming as if one's head was being cut off, the howling, yowling, and groaning that goes all through you, finishes me. Oh, I don't believe I want a violin after all, unless I could be put to sleep and not wake up until I was a finished player."

They were all laughing at the sudden transition.

"Oh, you did it beautifully," declared Miss Greatorex. "We'll forgive the not playing. And won't you play again, Stuart, with the two in that delicious accompaniment? I never heard anything like it."

It was really beautiful this time. With a fine violinist it would have enchanted an audience by its very mystery.

"Oh," began Amaryllis in the pause that followed, "the clock is striking ten. We must go home."

Miss Greatorex came over to Primrose.

"My dear," she said, "if you never play the violin you have music in every motion and in your feet. I want to come over and see you all—you certainly are wonderful children."

"Oh," returned Primrose eagerly, "you ought to hear Chan and Goldie do that bird music. I wish you would come. I'd like you to see Mother. She thinks I'm too much of a harum-scarum, and I *do* suppose I am. But I'm glad you did not think me rude or rough. You know we like Mrs. Bradley so much, and have such good times over here."

"You give good times of yourselves, and that is one of the finest of gifts."

They were so long saying good-night that Dan came over for them. Miss Greatorrex promised to visit them very soon.

"I didn't think I should like her at first," said Marigold, "but she's just jolly and nice."

"Well," said Stuart after the hall-door had shut, "aren't they a splendid lot! And there is another funny little fellow at home. You see, Cousin Jane, if they can do anything for you, they don't need a great lot of coaxing, and that's what I like. At home they are always doing and saying the most laughable things just for themselves. There isn't another as gay a lot in Grafton."

"Has Primrose ever seen a play?"

"Oh, yes! Their father took them to one or two last winter."

"I should think she'd be crazy for the stage. I should feel afraid."

"Oh, they are so engrossed with one another. They never seem to think of anything outside."

"Morland would snap her up in a moment. Keep her out of his ken."

"Children," said Mrs. Mann when they arrived, "it is even after half-past ten."

"Oh, Momey dear, we started at ten to say good-by, but there were so many of us, and as we didn't have glass slippers, we didn't have to come home barefoot. It's been a splendid time, and that Miss Greatorrex is coming over to see you. How many nice people there are in the world! It's just a beautiful world to live in!"

"Run to bed, all of you."

But they had to kiss their father good-night, and tell him the least little bit of all the fun.

"They do get so wild," said the little mother. "I shall be glad when vacation comes to an end."

The father laughed. Yes, the world was a beautiful place to live in nowadays. Wasn't that dismal, gray place of long ago and the woman always sewing when she had no need, a vague sort of dream?

CHAPTER XVIII

FARMER DENT'S WIFE

It was not all play, if it was vacation. Mrs. Mann kept so many of her old virtues and ideas. The children must not grow up thinking everything would come to them without effort, because they had an indulgent father. There would be years and years before they were all grown up, and it would take a good deal of money to do it. She could recall her plans and hopes made while Mr. Firth was alive. When their duty in the old house was done, they would sell, and go to some city where there were chances of education and advancement. Each child should follow out his own bent. Even then Mr. Firth had dreams of Chan's bird-like voice. Linn was a smart little fellow. He thought Goldie would be the family beauty. Amaryllis was such a domestic, motherly girl,—she should have a nice husband and a pretty home.

Bessy used to smile over the hopeful dreams. And then it came out so different. Grandmother

tied them to the house; Mr. Firth had to take the sad journey, and leave her to battle with life. And though prosperity had come, she took it with great thankfulness, but not with the joyous amusement Mr. Mann displayed. His past had been so sordid, so lacking in love and sympathy; hers had been lighted with the glow and sweetness of love. He was having what he had hungered for; she was trying to think of the future, if these blessings should fail.

So the girls were trained to consider housewifely duties no hardship. They could arrange the table, dust neatly; they sewed for an hour every day, and Primrose was so interested in a garment at times that she was loth to put it by. She worked with her whole heart just as she played, even if she was sometimes heedless. They had to consider one another's rights; there were so many of them, and their mother had that large sense of justice and equal rights, so admirable and so often wanting in mothers.

Rilla and Chan were conscientious about their music. Linn bothered them a good deal about their studies.

"For you know, Rilla, you *must* get through two classes next year, or you'll be 'way behind the other girls. I'm going to try for the High

School next summer. I just wish I was going in now with Stuart. We're both doing a little in Latin. His father's helping him, and Mr. Evans is coaching me a little. I do think Mr. Evans is just the nicest."

"But I can't like some of the things. Algebra—I can understand plain ciphering, but that seems so useless. And composition! And science! And Prim seems to just jump in the middle of a thing and ravel it out both ways."

Linn laughed. "You say lots of bright things, too, Rilla. You see, you were out of school a good while, but I want you to catch up with the other girls. You're not dreamy like Chan, but he is a genius. And now see—you thought you couldn't learn to play, and you are getting along so nicely."

"I think I'll be good for the common things of life," and she gave a quivering little laugh.

"You must try for some of the others with all your might and main. Think, in two weeks we shall be in school again."

"You're so good, Linn!"

"Then you pay back a little."

She thought she would like to stay at home and help with the housekeeping and sewing, and do things to comfort poor, lonely people. Prim and

Goldie would be the attractive ones, and Goldie really did take to learning.

Mrs. Bradley and Miss Greatorrex came over for a call, and they were made to promise to come to tea next week. Miss Greatorrex was delighted with her visit.

Then Granny Keen dropped quietly out of life. The funeral would be on Sunday, and they begged Mr. Evans to take charge of it, as there seemed no one else to call on. There was just a little Bible reading, and Chan's two hymns, and the lovely service at the grave.

It was a great surprise to the neighbors that Granny had enough money to bury her and to pay the nurse. Squire Briggs insisted that Mrs. Wilson should have seven dollars a week, as that would just take all.

"And there'd be two or three women I know who'd have been glad of four dollars a week," said Mrs. David. "I think it was just pure extravagance! And that woman let her give away two good as new blankets, and the silver spoons are to go to that Firth girl who can buy plenty for herself. It's a shame! They should have come to Dave."

The spoons had belonged to Granny's mother, not to the Keen side of the family. They were

over a hundred years old. Granny, in one of the lucid intervals, had intrusted them to Mrs. Briggs for that purpose.

"They were so good to me even when they were poor, an' their fine house and horses and carriage never set 'em up a bit," declared the quavering old voice. "I just want Rilla to have 'em. I sold most of my things that had any vally, and put by the money for my buryin'. Dave an' Mimy took all of Father Keen's. I'd a right to my own. An' if I'd had a hundred dollars, I'd left it to Rilla."

Mrs. Mann wondered if it was quite right to let all her children go over to North Meadow to visit some one they didn't know anything about. It was queer the farmer should ask it.

"And I took them off, you remember, when you didn't know much about me," laughed their father. "Now if he'd picked out the best of them, or two or three *he* thought the best, it wouldn't have been half the compliment. And think of that poor, lonely woman without even a grandchild nearby to give her pleasure. Why, of course they must go. But we'll send Dan over after them and give him strict orders to count every one, so we will be sure to get them all back again."

Mrs. Mann smiled in spite of her fears, for which she could find no foundation.

"It is a little queer," said Mr. Mann. "It took me quite by surprise, and like other silly fathers, I felt flattered. Some of those old farmers have a soft spot in their big bodies. I think I know just how he felt."

Mrs. Mann said no more. She thought some of them would give out at the last moment, but not one of them did. Tip was much engrossed with his cart. He had puzzled his young brain as to whether it should have two or four wheels. He could find only two just of a size.

"Two wheels are what makes it a cart—a wagon must have four," replied Dan.

Tip asked Rilla to look in the dictionary so as to be sure.

Then he bothered Prim as to whether she would have a goat or a donkey.

"I should rather have neither. You're as bad as Granny Keen, who never could decide whether she'd be wrecked on the sea or the land, and she wasn't likely to go to sea, or take a railroad journey."

"Well, you needn't be cross about it," subjoined Tip.

Prim gave a gay little nod.

So they were all attired for a frolic. Amaryllis was going from a sense of duty, Chan had something of the same feeling. Laurel brought her rag doll, newly arrayed with a clean face and a clean frock.

"If you're going to take that old thing, Lal Firth, I just won't go," flung out Rhoda. "I wouldn't be seen in such a company."

"Then you can stay home," was the independent reply. "Goldie said I might."

"Well, she's—she's *old*! She's 'most fifty years old, I guess."

"She ain't more'n ten."

The big country wagon came in sight. It was countrified enough, but the horses were fine. The farmer stepped out and greeted Mr. Mann.

"Me 'n' Mother have talked it over 'n' over. I hope they're all well, for she wants to see every one an' she wanted me to tell what color their eyes an' hair was. 'Land sakes,' sez I, 'you don't 'xpect me to remember the whole eight, only one on 'em's got the purtiest red curly head you ever did see.' Now get ready in a jiffy. Thank ye ever so much, ma'am," as the mother had joined the group, "fer lendin' 'em out this way, and we'll be as kerful of 'em as if they were white-an'-gilt chaney, an' bring 'em back safe an' sound.

'Tain't a very stylish rig, but it'll take you all in."

Amid laughter and kisses and good-bys they were lifted in, and it was explained that Dan would come for them to save a double journey. Tip and Prim sat on the front seat, though Marigold thought she ought to, and give her curly red hair an airing.

"Now where'll we find the chap that does the fiddlin'? Mother spoke special of him. An' I don't know but you gals will have to do some dancin' fer her. When she was a gal, there couldn't any one around beat her. They useter quarrel over her. An' I danced 'bout like an elephant, but she didn't seem to mind. Ye see, I was a ruther husky fellow," and he laughed heartily.

They picked up Stuart, and went on. After they had passed the meadows, there was a strip of woodlands and the shade was grateful. A bob-o'-link was trilling a merry lay. Chan caught it up, then Marigold, and Stuart put in a whistle now and then. Mr. Dent turned round, so amazed he checked the horses.

"Well—if that ain't the beatin'est thing I ever heard! I used to be a great whistler, but a fall took out two of my front teeth. How you put in all them things, an' birds goin' out o' sight! I've

heard 'em that way in May, when they seemed so glad to get to housekeeping. Oh, go on—don't stop."

Mr. Gwynne would have been amazed at the variations, perhaps the birds themselves.

"We might sing some real songs," said Linn.

They made the lonely road alive with melody. Two or three wagons passed, and half halted as long as they heard the sound. Then they turned in a lane with great branching maples shading it, with a cornfield on one side as far as you could see, and potatoes and two men digging them on the other.

Mrs. Dent came out on the porch. She was a rather small woman, with snowy white hair and a round face where wrinkles were putting tell-tale fingers.

"Oh, children!" she exclaimed. "I was afeard your mother'd back out when it came to the real startin'. An' I'm so glad! Oh! le's count. An' the twins——"

"I'm a twin," replied Rhoda. "But Laurel, she's very backward. She's only just begun to talk straight. And she's small for her size."

"Oh, you baby!" and Mrs. Dent clasped Laurel in her arms. "I'm so glad to have you here. I've been thinking it over, and I am glad you haven't

grown any more. But it's funny, too. You're just a little darling!"

Laurel raised her sweet face and kissed her.

In some way they managed to get into the house and the farmer began to introduce them, but he did get names mixed up, and laughed over it.

This was really the living-room, and so large they were not a bit crowded. There was an immense stone fireplace, with a narrow shelf above, on which were a pair of brass candlesticks and two queer pitchers that would have won a curio hunter. Two corners of the room were cut off by closets, and one side was a big desk with room for books above. There were chairs set around the room and a table in the middle. A door opened to the real kitchen, and there was a large stove beside the fireplace, where hung a crane.

They talked and laughed, Mrs. Dent was so sweet and friendly, and Primrose had a gift of friendliness without being aggressive. The farmer's wife took their hats and brought chairs from their places against the wall.

"And you must be powerful hungry with this long ride. Now draw up to the table. I baked cookies yesterday and a lot of gingerbread and some jelly puffs. And if any of you like butter-milk, there's quarts of that, and sweet milk."

They protested they were not hungry, but the cookies were so good, and the jelly puffs were too tempting. They seemed like dainty rolls, that were cooked like doughnuts, just big enough to bite all round, and some delicious jelly in the middle. Amaryllis thought at once she must ask how they were made. And how good the buttermilk was!

Then Mr. Dent came in and laughed at the merry group. They had begun to draw back their chairs. And now they must come out and see what a big farm was like. Grafton people didn't know anything about real farms.

Amaryllis didn't care to go: she wanted to learn about the jelly rolls. And Laurel was sitting in the mother-lap.

There was a field full of cows, Goldie thought, and two of the loveliest brown-eyed Alderney calves in a little enclosure by themselves. Mr. Dent picked up some red clover heads and fed them and rubbed their noses.

"They're learning to do without their mothers," he said. "They cried a good deal at first, and I felt so sorry."

"Oh, why did you take them away?" asked Prim impulsively.

"Well—I had to. Their mother didn't seem to

mind so much. They're first-class stock, and are bespoke. And here's five more pretty fellows, two months older. That littlest one is a Jersey. I keep raisin' some nice stock all the time. I want some young things around. And I have two of the dandiest colts."

Marigold didn't think the colts were so pretty; their legs were too long and thin. But there was a year-old that *was* handsome, with eyes full of mischief, and looking as if he could laugh.

Out on a little rise of ground there was a flock of sheep. Chan thought there might be a hundred.

"Well, there's eighty or so—you're not so bad at a guess. And now here's a pretty sight, if it is a pig-pen."

It was comparatively clean, with plenty of straw around. And there were eleven of the daintiest little pigs, their pink skin showing through the white hair. How they did squeal and run about!

"Why, I never thought pigs so pretty," said Stuart.

"They're kept nice and clean. Pigs enjoy a certain kind of cleanliness, though most people don't believe it. I like the white ones, but here are some that a few people prefer. They put on fat easily."

They were mottled and spotted, and their mother was largely black. No, they were not as pretty. Linn thought of the slipshod farms and the neglected places at Denby.

Meanwhile Amaryllis and Mrs. Dent were having a cordial talk on housekeeping matters. She was still holding Laurel, who filled up any space she could find with her little dribblets of talk with no special continuity about her dolls and Amy and playing tea and the doll who could walk and say "Mamma."

"Why, I never heard such a thing!" in surprise.

"She isn't real alive, and though I've had her a good long while she can't say anything more. There's something inside of her, but our talk comes from inside, too. An' you must wind her up to make her walk."

There was dinner to look after, and they went out into the other kitchen, where a man was making himself most useful.

"This is my Peter, and he's better than any hired girl. He can work outside and in, and cook you the nicest dinner. Girls get so lonesome, and I don't feel to blame 'em much. When I first came here the farmers' daughters used to go out, but there ain't no such big families nowadays, and the girls marry. Then you do want a good many

men hands on a farm like this. I wish some of our boys had stayed home, but they're all doing well."

Then there was an outburst of voices and of children as well. The table was soon arranged, and such a dinner! There was another in the adjoining kitchen, where several hands sat down. Mrs. Dent shut the door between and listened to the queer comments of the children. How merry they were!

And the dessert had a new feature. They had never seen nectarines before, and here was a great dish of them. Luscious peaches and pears, too, but they couldn't hold everything.

Peter came in and cleared the table. "Now Mother's goin' to have you," began the farmer. "I want you to play the fiddle, an' speak that piece, an' sing, 'cause she don't get about much. If I had known about that there picnic I'd brought her down. We do go to the farmers', but there ain't many children. Seem's as if they'd gone out of fashion."

They gathered around in a sort of circle. Stuart played all the exercises he knew, some over twice, and then they sang. Laurel still kept her place on Mrs. Dent's lap.

"Well, that's the beautifullest singin' I ever

heard! Why, it's like the voice of an angel," declared the farmer. "I s'pose you don't know any old-fashioned hymns?"

They did know a few their mother sang. Mrs. Dent's eyes filled with tears, and she hugged Laurel tighter. Then there was the great piece to speak for Mother, and they thought of other things. Linn had them all laughing at the queer old man "who sat upon the gate," and then at "The Walrus and the Carpenter" from "Through the Looking-Glass."

"Well, that beats me!" ejaculated the host. "How anybody could think up such a queer lot——"

"And I never s'posed oysters could walk, or even get about with them clumsy shells. Now crabs are hustlin' fellows, give 'em a chance for their six legs. An' lobsters——"

That brought out the gayest of laughs.

"Well, it was mean when they'd coaxed 'em out, to fall to an' eat 'em up, and pretend to cry over them. An' you don't s'pose the walrus really talked? I never see a walrus."

Then they had to tell about the animals in the Park, and the farmer said, "We must go down there some day, Mother. We oughtn't drop quite out of the world, if we do be gettin' old."

"You must be tired now. Have some peaches, an' then run around. You must be stiff sittin' still."

"But plays are so noisy," protested Amaryllis.

"Never mind. Now there's 'Blindman's Buff.' We'll have the table pushed up one side."

So they went at it with great zest. Mrs. Dent was much amused. Linn and Stuart went cautiously about, but when Prim was "It," she flew around with outstretched arms and soon caught some one. The old farmer laughed and clapped his hands. Never had the big living-room seen such merriment.

There were other plays, and the fun was running high when Dan came driving up the lane.

"Oh, it isn't really time to go home!" began Primrose in surprise.

"And to go without supper," said Mrs. Dent.

"It's a long drive," said Dan, "and there's quite a weight with you all, so we must go a little slowly. Haven't you had noise enough, Mrs. Dent?"

"I declare it makes me feel ten years younger. Why, I couldn't have had a better time if I'd gone to the county fair. An' if ever the folks want to spare some of them, send them over here."

Mrs. Dent started up and brought out plates of cake and fruit, bewailing the fact that they

couldn't stop for supper. "And they must come again, sure."

"But we only have another week before school," explained Linn.

"Saturday then," answered Farmer Dent. "I'll come in for you any time."

Mrs. Dent packed a bag of nectarines, since they had proved such a treat. And there were tears in her eyes as she kissed them good-by, and said over and over again she was so much obliged for their coming, and she had not had such a fine day for years.

At last they were packed in, some on the floor, but Dan had brought a lot of cushions. And they talked over the day.

"Somehow it seemed like a play to me, and made me think of the little old house when we used to do those funny things with just Mother for audience," remarked Linn.



NEVER HAD THE BIG LIVING-ROOM SEEN SUCH MERRIMENT.

Page 333.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST OF VACATION

MR. MANN was much interested in hearing of the day's pleasure and the great farm with all its different kinds of stock, and the sweet house-mother, the serving man, and the great rooms.

"And he hasn't a single goat," interposed Tip rather indignantly. "There's a great field of sheep. I asked him, and he said he wouldn't have a goat around, that they were not worth anything. And I said you could drive them with a cart, and that they cost a good deal, but he only laughed."

"He evidently does not know the value of goats," replied Mr. Mann, with a twinkle in his eye.

Laurel did not want any supper, and crept up in a big chair, where she went fast asleep. The others were not especially hungry; they had been so stuffed. Mrs. Mann said the nectarines were very good, and she did not remember ever having seen any before.

"And now," exclaimed Mr. Mann, "I haven't

had my turn and after next week you all start for school. You have made so many new friends that I have been quite left in the lurch. You ought to make some sort of excursion or picnic for me."

They glanced in dismay at each other, and then at his serious expression.

"But you see"—and Marigold stopped with a flushed face.

"What do I see?" in a very earnest tone.

"Well—people have asked us, and company have come of their own accord. And we haven't much money——"

"Why, we might get up a play and charge admittance," and Prim sprang up, waving her hand, and whisking her yellow braids about. "I do believe I could write a play. And if we charged ten cents admittance, ten people would make a dollar, and how much would it take? We might go over to Ridgewood to something. Oh, Chan might give a concert."

The others looked from Prim to their father. He threw back his head and laughed.

"You see we haven't been anywhere together just as a family. And suppose I give the party and invite you all out. We were going to Central Park some time, you know. Chan wanted to see the beautiful collection of birds. Primrose wanted

so much to see a real mummy. Linn wanted to see a splendid game of baseball——”

“And couldn’t I have a goat ride again? Then I could tell——” and Tip leaned on his father’s knee.

“And pleasuring stops next week. I shall expect you to study for old and new all next year to make up for the fun. On next Saturday there is to be a splendid game of baseball between two fine teams. We could put the other things in between whiles. Mr. Collamore could only show you a little of it. And we would take Cap, just to see her amazement, and hear her quaint remarks.”

“Oh, Father, yours will be the most splendid of all! And Cap will go wild.”

“Children,” said their mother, trying to look severe, “I think you have had enough pleasure to last until next summer. And it is so near school time——”

“Well, we’ll get everything ready, and lay out our clothes so we can just jump into them on Monday morning, and go to school without a word——”

“And be promoted at the first examination,” subjoined Linn with a nod.

“And not tease for a single thing.”

“Only——” began Tip.

"Hush!" and Prim placed her hand over his mouth.

"You are all tired now and had better go to bed," and Mr. Mann rose. "We'll talk the matter over on Monday. Now be good children."

Rhoda had dropped in a corner and gone to sleep. He carried her upstairs, and then came for the baby of the flock, who put her arms around his neck and said, "You so good. I love you," in the sleepest of tones.

Mrs. Mann did try to dissuade him, but he laughingly declared the plan was for her and himself and Cap, who deserved a reward for faithfulness and cheerfulness.

They were quite rested the next morning and went to church and Sunday School with blithe readiness. Tip promised not to say a word to Rhoda, who had a suspicion, in spite of the silence, that there was something in the air.

It was a busy week. School clothes had to be looked up. The boys could keep on summer things a while and then take their best suits for every day. They were getting too big for home-made clothes, so were the more easily provided for. And Mrs. Mann was thankful the girls were ready to accept what she thought best. The laundry work was

finished, and then Cap was informed of the pleasure awaiting her.

She stood still struck with amazement, looking as if Mr. and Mrs. Mann were wandering in their minds.

"No, you can't mean it!" she began. "It's just awful good of you! I'd thought if Abe and I could afford it, we'd go to the city when we were married, if that time ever comes. He don't 'pear to be real lucky, but ther' ain't a great many places goin' round, and you can't take your pick, so you must take up with what ther' is. When I once get hold of him, he'll stir 'round, I guess! So mebbe it'll be a good thing to have my part of the weddin' tower first. Oh, I can't say how much I'm obleeged to you," and the tears actually stood in Cap's eyes.

"I'd hardly know how to get on without you, with all the children——"

"You jest leave the little ones to me, an' you and Mr. Mann have a good time. You're alwers thinkin' of other people an' I'm glad you have the sort of husband that thinks of you first," and Cap rushed out to the kitchen.

Was it she or the children? Bessy wondered.

"Mother," said Linn in the afternoon. "I'm going over to see Stuart. Wouldn't it be nice to

ask them all to join us on Saturday? You know, they were so good to me that day they were going to Central Park. And Stuart will be just wild to see that splendid ball game."

"Why, yes. It's very good of you to think of it. Give them your father's wishes and mine."

"It'll just be a ripping windup to vacation."

Mr. Mann was pleased with it as well. The children were simply brimming over with delight. Only Laurel wished they could have Amy.

"We will take her some other time," promised the mother.

"And Gladys 'll be real lonesome."

Mrs. Mann smiled a little. She was not quite sure of Mrs. Chedister's approval, though they had grown very neighborly, and Gladys was delighted to come in and share the fun. But she said occasionally to her mother, "I wish I didn't need to be quite so much dressed up. Lace tears so easily."

"There's so many of them to dress that Mrs. Mann has to be economical, while you are our only one."

Gladys wanted to say she did not think it much fun to be the only one. But her mother had corrected her several times for saying "fun." It was vulgar.

Friday was a great day. They might have been

going to Europe. Cap baked enough for a regiment.

"But, you see, there'll be no time to do the regular work to-morrow. And then will come Sunday. We can't starve on Sunday."

Sure enough. And there did seem a regiment.

They were dressed, and set on chairs just as they used to be in the little old house. And the first one who left her or his chair would have to stay at home.

"Dan might take part of us down to the station," suggested Linn.

"But could you manage them?"

The little mother was getting tired. They were so much larger than they used to be.

Primrose went along. She had the art of arranging.

So presently the whole party reached the station. Mr. Mann wanted to know if he looked serious enough to be taken for a Sunday School teacher treating his class to an excursion.

Cap had two boxes done up with a strap. The Bradley boys sat on the seat in front and Linn beside her to explain things and arouse her astonishment. It certainly did make a great deal of fun until Prim felt jealous.

Then there was the immense station, the trolley

where the conductor looked amazed, and at last the beautiful park, where Cap's surprise knew no bounds.

What would they do first?

"We boys want the afternoon for the ball game. The paper says it's going to be the grandest of the season."

"And I want to go to that place where the donkeys are and the goat-carts," declared Tip.

"And I *must* see a mummy, or my heart will be broken all into little bits," cried Primrose, who had been stuffing her mind about Egyptian royalty.

"I think we all better go to the Museum first," said Mr. Mann. "The game doesn't begin until three."

"But I can't play ball," moaned Tip.

"Then we will have given all the time we can spare to this end of the park."

"And there are all the beautiful birds, and the pictures and the statuary," said Stuart. "You will like that," to Amaryllis.

Chan had each of his little sisters by the hand, laughing now and then at their wondering remarks, which were much on the order of Cap's, though her knowledge was a little wider.

Mrs. Mann declared she was as much surprised

as the children. Could there be so many beautiful birds in the world!

"You will see that I am an ignorant country woman," she said in her pretty, deprecating manner. "And I have always had so much to do."

"But your children speak for you, Mrs. Mann. We think Linn such a nice boy, and surely Amaryl-lis is a little lady. You've taken time to train them," was Mrs. Bradley's commendation.

"Some of that is due to Mrs. Alden, the house-keeper we had," Bessy replied with a flush. "And then you know in a place like Denby there are not so many really bad children, though they may be a little rude and uncouth. And we lived in a rather out-of-the-way place."

Primrose had her desire presently.

"Is that a mummy!" almost in disgust. "That black shrunken-up thing? Why, you can't tell what it is! I'm glad I didn't belong to Egyptian royalty. And to be dug up out of your grave and carried about for a show, when you look like that! I'm sorry for *you*, whatever your name may be, but I'd rather stay in my grave, thank you. The marble men and women are ever so much prettier."

They were beautiful, and the older children recalled bits of mythology and fairy-stories. Ama-

ryllis thought this department and the picture gallery the most entertaining of all.

“Though you can’t see it all in a few hours,” said Mr. Bradley, pleased with her interest and surprised by her discrimination. “But, then, young people can come again and again.”

Tip had kept Goldie busy answering his questions and wonders, as to why these things were so. Then they had to say good-by to all the remarkable curiosities, and it was inspiring to go out in the sunshine, and find a beautiful nook where they could distribute their lunch. And they were surprised to find how the day was going.

They made their way over to the children’s playground. The men and four of the boys decided to see the ball game. The ladies would roam around—the park was brilliant everywhere on Saturday afternoon. There was music, too, that fairly bewitched Prim and Goldie.

And then there were the donkeys and goat-carts and the merry youngsters, laughing and riding and choosing the pretty animals. Rhoda was very proud of what she thought her courage. Laurel was at last persuaded to try the pretty carriage with two dainty Shetland ponies; the older ones took to the donkeys.

Tip tried them first, but went back to his first

love, the goat-cart. There was one splendid big fellow whose horns were quite fierce. After Tip had been around once he begged to drive all by himself. He drove their horse at home, and a goat wasn't nearly as big.

So he started off. His goatship went very well for about half the course. Tip was holding his head high, when the fellow began to back. He pulled the reins, which made it worse, then he thought of the boy they had met one day when they were out driving. Tip's goat backed up on the grass, and the little groom came running, but before he reached them the animal started off at full tilt. Tip was clearly run away with, and that was mortifying. A man in the path caught the goat suddenly, but with one fierce butt, he was thrown down and over went boy and carriage and all. By this time the little groom had come up with them. The man rose, brushed the dirt from his attire, and laughed. Tip had picked himself up also.

"Are you hurt, little man? It's the first time in my life that I've been run down and bowled over by a goat."

No, Tip wasn't hurt. But he did want to cry with a sort of childish rage, and he shook his fist at the goat, who now looked very demure.

"Do you want to go on?" asked the boy.

"No, I don't." Then suddenly Tip doubled up his small fist and hit the goat between the eyes, and was immediately sent over and over on the soft turf.

The small groom caught the reins, and held in the goat, who had not had enough of the fight. Tip recovered himself partly, and sat there, his attitude saying, "Come on, if you want to."

"You're a bad boy!" declared the keeper. "You shall never, never ride my goat again."

"I don't want to!" cried Tip angrily. "I wouldn't have your mean old goat for a gift. I'd take him off and drown him in the river with a stone tied to his neck."

"What's the rumpus here?" asked a Park policeman, who came up. "Sonny, are you hurt?"

Tip sprang up. They had all gathered 'round.

"No, I'm not hurt. 'Twould take more'n a beastly old goat to do it! And I gave him a good welt in the snout."

"Oh, Tip," exclaimed his mother. "I'm ashamed of you!" and she began brushing him off with her handkerchief.

"I wish I'd kicked him instead! I didn't think of it first."

The policeman laughed. "Take your goat away," to the boy. Mr. Mann came over and put his arm around Tip.

"Oh, you can all laugh," he said with bravado. "You see, it was so sudden. I'd like to have a good square fight——"

"No, I wouldn't tackle a goat, his headpiece is rather strong for a small boy," said a bystander. "Your lad?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Mann. "No great damage done."

"He's a plucky little fellow."

The children were clustering around him, eager to know just what had happened.

"Let us go on," said Mr. Mann. "Tip's all right."

They picked up their few belongings. Mr. Bradley looked at his watch.

"Now I think we had better go over and have some dinner. I know of a nice restaurant just outside of the park. And the day has been long enough for these young people, I think."

It was only a short walk. The restaurant was a nice place, with an inviting balcony, and the children begged to go up.

"I do want to know about it all," began Prim. "And you were not hurt a bit?"

"It was funny when the man was mixed up in the mêlée!" said Linn. "What happened?"

"Well, the goat was contrary. If I'd had a whip! A boy one time said they took spells. I sha'n't have a goat—Bonnie's enough sight better."

"It was funny," declared Stuart, laughing. "I'm glad you were not hurt, Tip."

The laugh began to go round. Tip turned red, but held his head up bravely. Only if he *could* have kicked the goat instead of that little blow with his fist.

It was rather early for the place to be crowded, but the few customers about thought them a very merry party. Then the dinner came, and they were all hungry.

"Rilla," whispered Chan, "do you remember the feast with Mr. Collamore?"

"Oh, wasn't that elegant!"

"But we've had a grand good time. We haven't seen half. And the bridges and the lake and those merry squirrels chasing each other about, and going in your pocket for nuts. But the park will last and we can come times and times. How many splendid things there are in the world! Aren't you glad you are alive, Amaryllis?"

The girl's eyes were misty with delight, as she

nodded. But they couldn't have had all these pleasures except for Father Mann.

After a bountiful meal they started homeward, closely packed in a trolley-car, but they didn't mind. They reached the great station just in time for the first call for the train, so they had a good chance for seats. Cap held Rhoda while Mr. Mann had Tip beside him and Laurel in his lap. The older children talked and laughed, but tried not to attract attention. What a day it had been! Even Stuart declared he would not have missed it for anything, "but you folks always do have such a good time. It's because there are so many of you, and you keep so good-natured. And Tip always does something funny."

Dan was waiting at the station. The children were bundled in with Cap to look after them, and the elders would walk rather than wait. But Dan thought he would go back and meet them halfway.

"Kettle's on," he said to Cap, "and the table's spread. I suppose you are all hungry."

"We had a big dinner before we started. An' I'm glad enough to get home. But I don't expect ever to have such a grand time again."

"I just want to go to bed," said Rhoda. "My legs ache, I've walked and run so much, and gone

up and downstairs. O dear! Rilla, put me to bed."

Amaryllis took up Laurel in her arms, and Rhoda followed. Their hands and faces were washed, for she was really too tired to give them a bath. Tip had taken the sofa corner, and now Mother and Father came in.

"All I want, Cap, is a cup of your good tea. That restaurant stuff was wretched. All the rest was good enough," and Mr. Mann seated himself. Bessy was very tired, and glad the twins were in bed. No one was hungry.

Then they adjourned to the library.

"O dear!" said Prim almost lugubriously, "do you realize this is the last day of vacation? And what a splendid vacation it has been! We've gone about so much and seen so much, and met so many nice people that we're just pressed down and running over with pleasure. There will never be anything just like it again, there can't be," emphasizing it with her head.

"You will all be a year older, and, I hope, a year wiser, but not any less happy. You will want different things," and their mother paused.

"I'm glad you have been so happy. I wanted you to have the good time when you could enjoy it, with no thought of the future."

"Oh, Father Mann, you're the sweetest and dearest father a houseful of children could have! And we don't know how to thank you, but we all love you, and shall to the very end of time."

Primrose had her arms around him, and in an instant the rest followed suit, all talking at once and kissing him with warm, rosy lips.

Was there a happier man? Oh, was not the sweetest, dearest thing in the world loving and being loved? It made the wilderness of the world blossom like the rose, when the fragrant incense was laid on the altar of home. And the tears came into his eyes, as he thought of the hundreds of little children who were never to know what home was like, some who never knew their parents, some who were beaten and half-starved. He must not forget them in all this delight.

Oh, what a year of happiness it had been! And all the coming years! Oh, he knew he could trust God for them.

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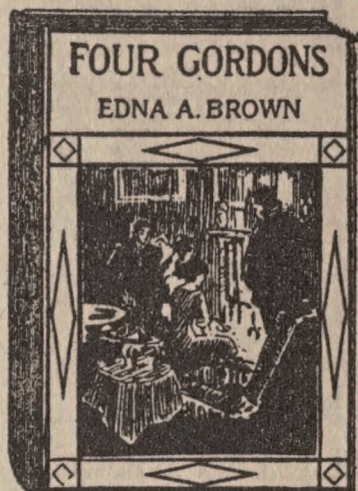
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